



Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center World War II Project Interview with Donald Watts

JW: Would you tell us your full name, please.

DW: My full name is Donald Gilmore Watts.

JW: Okay. What is your birthday?

DW: (DELETED CONTENT)

JW: And what were your parents' names?

DW: My father's name was Jennings Brian Watts, and he was born at East Lynn in West Virginia, and was born in the year 1896. My mother's full name was Willie Mae Witham, and she was born in Sumner County, Tennessee. She was basically the same age as my father, within a few months.

JW: Did you have brothers and sisters?

DW: Had one sister, Joan. Course we all called her Jo, some people called her Joan, and my mother and dad called her Joanne, and she was my only sibling. She married a Dr. Benson and spent most of her life in Texas. But after she and her husband divorced and she retired, she moved to Fort Smith and spent the last ten or so years of her life here in Fort Smith, and she's sorely missed, wonderful woman.

JW: And do you have any children?

DW: I have two boys. I say I have two boys, we have two boys. The oldest is Jennings Randolph Watts. He's married with one son who's fourteen and they live in Grand Prairie, Texas. My youngest son, James Bradley Watts, and wife, still live in Huntington, West Virginia.

JW: And where were you born?

DW: I was born in Huntington, West Virginia.

JW: And is that where you were raised?

DW: I was raised there. I attended public school, wonderful school system in Huntington. Started to Marshall College in Huntington. And about the third month of my first semester, I received a special greeting from the President of the United States, which took me on a two year tour of the Pacific.

JW: And what year was that?

DW: I left the States in May of 1945, sailed out of Seattle, Washington, first stop was Pearl Harbor. The next stop was Saipan. And the major fighting on Saipan had been concluded, but there were a lot of Japanese holed up in the mountains in caves and that was my first taste of warfare we had, routing the remaining Japanese soldiers out of the mountains. From there, I sailed to Okinawa. Landed under a kamikaze attack of all things that blew up the ship next to us, approximately 1500 men disappeared in a flash.

JW: Do you recall the name of the ship?

DW: No, I don't. I recall the name of the ship, believe it or not, that I came home on, that was in 1946. But from Okinawa, we were in training. I was a communications Sergeant and we were in training for the invasion of Japan when the news came that Japan had surrendered. And within ten days, I was aboard an old what they called a Dakota, 2 which was one of the early two engine transport planes and landed at Atsugi Airport in Tokyo and spent approximately a little over a year in Japan, most of it in Tokyo proper.

JW: Now, was this after the Japanese had given up?

DW: Oh, yes. I don't remember the date of the signing of the end of hostilities on the Battleship Missouri, but I flew in after that. And like I said, Atsugi Airport is Tokyo's main airport. I was in an Infantry Division, the 27th Division. And the division had been in the war from Hawaii to the end of hostilities. So they sent the colors, deactivated the 27th Division and sent the colors back to the

States. And I didn't have quite enough points to come back at that time. So I had my pick of several units to finish my tour of duty and I selected a 720th Military Police Battalion in Tokyo proper. And I worked there as a desk Sergeant until I was rotated back to the States.

JW: Do you remember what kind of work that was? Was it drunken sailors, what did you do at work every day?

DW: I've written several stories. That was the most interesting part of my time in the service. We encountered everything, including things that you couldn't believe existed or would exist. But as a desk sergeant, I had what was called a daily blotter. I imagine most people have seen a police show on television where there's a man up on a raised platform with a desk and police officers bring people in and he logs them into a log and states the charges against them and such like. Three other sergeants and I were on a rotating basis, eight hours on and twenty-four hours off, ran what was called the city desk right in downtown Tokyo. I could look out the window behind my desk and look at the Emperor's moat and the Emperor's palace. And two blocks away was the Ginza, which is the main street in downtown Tokyo. I could see the front of Supreme Headquarters Pacific, General MacArthur's headquarters. I was right in the middle of downtown Tokyo.

JW: The people that you dealt with, I mean the police actions that you were involved in, that was just American citizens or was that Japanese also?

DW: Actually it was both. The way we handled that, I was stationed in the Japanese Metropolitan Police Bureau, which was the headquarters of the Japanese Police Department in Tokyo, that was my headquarters. When we had incidents that involved Japanese, we involved the Japanese Metropolitan Police. Normally we turned them over to the police because the crimes committed were really crimes against Japanese law, rather than American law. Of course the war was over. There were a lot of Marines and sailors and soldiers, Russians, you name it, Englishmen, Canadians, Australians. We were all in Tokyo in what was called the Army of Occupation. And a lot of pent up frustration was released after the end of the war and a lot of it involved alcohol, as you can imagine. We had very little difficulty with the Japanese. The Japanese really respected authority. In fact, I remember one time I was fishing, I'm an old fisherman, and I was fishing in Tokyo in the Emperor's moat of all places. I may have been the first person that ever fished in the Emperor's moat. But anyway, a large crowd of Japanese gathered and I knew something was going on because there was a lot of jabbering. And I had an interpreter with me and I asked my interpreter, I said, "What's going on here?" He said, "Well, no one's ever fished in the Emperor's moat and they think it might be sacrilegious or some violation of something." And I said, "Oh, I see." I said, "Well, I didn't know this." I said, "Tell them that I am a member of the military police stationed in the Metropolitan Police Bureau and I didn't realize that I was breaking a custom." And he did, and the Japanese, all of them, started bowing to me. And I said, "Well, what in the world did you tell them?" He said, "Well, the Japanese Army doesn't have military police, but they have a special organization called the

kempitai." And I said, "The kempitai?" He said, "Are you familiar with the German Gestapo?" I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "Well, the kempitai, the Japanese thought police." And when I used the word kempitai, ahhh, fish all you want to. I told him after it, I said, "Well, I learned something. The word kempitai is really a passport." He said, "Yes, it is."

JW: Well, my father was one of those soldiers in Japan at the same time. You may have had him float across your desk for all I know.

DW: I hope not.

JW: He refused to say a word about World War II when he came back.

DW: I can understand that.

JW: And he died at fifty-five. Maybe if he'd lived longer, he would have decided to talk about it. I've talked to several Veterans who said that just in the last few years that they felt any desire to talk about it.

DW: In the last ten years, I'm now eighty years old, and the last ten years, I have probably written ten to fifteen World War II stories. Before that time about ten years ago, I didn't put down a word; but I was ready.

JW: Well, the reason I bring him up is something went wrong. I mean something in his military career didn't go right and I figure that's one of the main reasons he didn't say anything because-- Anyway, what I am wondering, based on a brother of his that was also in Japan, I'm wondering did you run across a lot of mistreatment of the Japanese after the war was over?

DW: Yes, but little. I did see cases of mistreatment but there was very little. Most of the mistreatment that I saw, well, you can call it mistreatment, but I personally referred to it as brutality, and it was done by men who had been really hardened by war. I remember a stage show came to Tokyo from the States at the Ernie Powell Theater. And I was in a line waiting to move into the theater, and a soldier ahead of me was smoking a cigarette. And he smoked about half the cigarette and then he just dropped it and it landed by his side on the concrete, entranceway to the Ernie Powell Theater. I should back up and state that tobacco was a great rarity in Japan because they really had no source. They would take cigarette butts and split the paper from the tobacco that was

in the remainder of the cigarette. A little boy, he couldn't have been over four or five years old, when he saw that cigarette butt hit the sidewalk, he immediately dashed and reached for it. And just as he picked it up, this soldier in front of me put his foot on the little boy's hand and put two hundred pounds on him, just went like this. That is brutality more than mistreatment. But on the other side of the coin, the men that had been in the Pacific for two, three or four years, had experienced all types of brutality. The Japanese were harsh and brutal, also. And I think most people that are familiar with World War II are familiar with the Bataan Death March. The Japanese Army was quite brutal in their campaigns and their warfare against the Chinese in China and also against the American and Allied troops. So there were a lot of men that were really battle hardened and brutalized to a certain extent. And tell you the truth, I often wondered about these men; fortunately, I was not one of them. But I just wondered how they fitted into civilized society when they returned to the States. Some of the men with which I was acquainted were professional killers, they became professional killers. On Okinawa, we had about six or seven men in my organization, the organization to which I was attached. They didn't pull normal duty. They would black their hands and necks and faces, and after dark, they'd crawl through the lines with a knife in their teeth. They were professional killers. And these fellows, in time, had to come back into a civilized society. I've often wondered about that, how they adjusted.

JW: Well, we've recently had all kinds of stories of brutality in the Iraq War.

DW: Yes, yes.

JW: And I'm torn between thinking that that's a terrible, terrible, terrible thing, which it is, and wondering how, when you train somebody to be a killer, why would you expect them to have tea party manners at all times?

DW: The war there in Iraq is a little different war than the war we fought against the Japanese. We fought against uniformed troops, you knew who the enemy was. The war in Iraq, you don't know who the enemy is. It could be a seven year old boy, he could have a hand grenade under his armpit and walk up to you and you would think he would be-- it's hard to imagine a seven year old boy being a combatant, and women.

JW: I remember that from Viet Nam.

DW: Yes. I read an article a day or two ago there in Yemen, the government captured a group of saboteurs that were going to blow up an oil refinery. And I don't know how they got word of it, but they discovered it and they captured them. And in going through their dwelling, they found all these women dresses, ladies dresses, you know, the mask and all that. And it seemed that these men

would put on women's attire and parade as women. The thinking being who would suspect women of sabotage and trying to blow up a refinery. So we're fighting a very, very difficult war right now against radical Muslims. It's a different war. Well, it's organized, but organized in little small cells. One cell doesn't know what another cell is doing. 5 There's no way to track these organizations. It's quite different. But war can brutalize, there's no question about it. Being a former combat soldier, I can visualize a combat soldier in Iraq. He's in a war zone, his unit's being fired on and it's coming from a particular house, so they rush the house. And then entering the house, here are people, men, women and children. You don't know which one of them is going to try to shoot you, so what do you do. You can't stop and say all enemy combatants to the front, please, and you ladies and children to the back. It's not fought that way. It's a very difficult war to fight, the way they're fighting this present war. Luckily, I was able to be engaged with an enemy that was uniformed and you knew who the enemy was. The same was true of the war in Europe.

JW: Well, let me ask you to back up a little bit. Do you remember the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed?

DW: Yes, remotely. I don't remember the specifics and so forth. It was quite a shock.

JW: It's not one of those things that you remember right where you were and what you were doing?

DW: No, I don't remember where I was. Lot of people probably do, but I don't remember. I was of school age.

JW: We run across a lot of Veterans from around here that said, well, I didn't know about it until the next day because we didn't have a radio and nobody around us had a radio.

DW: It was somewhat of a different world in the early Forties than it is today. I guess young people today probably think that computers and television and aircraft and all those type of things were in existence for hundreds of years, but they haven't. I can still remember gathering around the radio in the evening, the family, that was the only really entertainment of that type that there was. And I can still remember a lot of those old programs, Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, the Shadow, and Ma Perkins, it was a different world back then.

JW: But you would have been about fifteen in 1941?

DW: Yes. I was born in 1926, and '41, I'd have been fifteen years old, I was in high school.

JW: So you had graduated from high school and were in your first year of college when you were drafted?

DW: Graduated from high school in June of 1944 and I entered the Army in November of 1944. Went through basic training at Camp Blanding, Florida, completed it in April. I was on my way to the West Coast to travel to the Pacific Theater of Operations, and they gave us what was called a delay en route. I had ten days en route at home and then on to the Pacific.

JW: And you were flown when you went overseas?

DW: No, I went overseas by ship.

JW: By ship? 6

DW: I sailed out of Seattle, Washington.

JW: Do you remember the name of that ship?

DW: No, I don't, been too long. There are things that you never forget; and unfortunately, there are things that you do forget. But some of the things I don't think I'll ever forget was we were shipside and we were all eighteen year old kids right out of high school, college, and here's this huge ship. We're in formation going up the gang plank. And the ladies of the American Red Cross were serving coffee and donuts as we passed along, and a band was playing Sentimental Journey. Oddly enough, I sailed overseas to the song Sentimental Journey; and I came back from overseas, listening to the same song, Sentimental Journey.

JW: Well, that's a pretty good song. If you got to have one, that's a pretty good one to have. So you left out of Seattle and you went where?

DW: Pearl Harbor.

JW: Pearl Harbor?

DW: Didn't even get off the ship. We arrived at Pearl Harbor, and over the next two or three days, I would say another twenty-five or thirty ships just materialized, so to speak.

JW: Now, this was before the end of the war?

DW: Oh, yes, this is 1944.

JW: Okay.

DW: No, I take it back. This is 1945, early 1945. These ships assembled there at Pearl and formed what we called a convoy; and from there, the convoy moved to Saipan. And just a note in passing, from where I was bivouacked on Saipan, each morning I would watch the B-29s fly off the little island of Tinian, which was right off the shore of Saipan, a major air base. These B-29s would take off right at dawn and they were on their bombing run over Japan. And right at the edge of dark, we would go out and watch, stand on the beach and watch them come in. It was an all day flight to Japan and return, and look at those planes coming back with holes that big in their wings and rudders shot off of them. And the Enola Gaye that dropped the atomic bomb, flew from this little island of Tinian. I wasn't on Saipan very long before I was assigned to an outfit on Okinawa where the real fighting was going on at that time.

JW: And what did you say they had trained you to be? What had they trained you, what job had they trained you for?

DW: One of the most interesting things in my life is full of little quirks and turns. I arrived on Okinawa and I was assigned to Company E, 165th Infantry. I'd been there about a day and a company clerk came to the tent and said, "Private Watts, the Company Commander would like to see you." I said, oh, gee, what have I done. So I followed the company clerk back to company headquarters and the company commander was there, and he had a folder in front of him. He said, "Private Watts, I see here that you have had some courses in high school in radio communications." And I said, "Yes, sir." I said, 7 "I built two or three during the course, I built two or three radios." He said, "You're now our radio sergeant, our communications sergeant." No, I take it back. "You are now our radio operator." And I said, "Now, I want to explain right now that my knowledge of radios is very fundamental." He said, "That may be true, but you know more than anyone else in the company." So there's something to be said for education. So I became the company radio operator. And believe it or not, within a week, company clerk was back at the tent and said Corporal Watts

now, said, "Corporal Watts, company commander would like to see you." I said, oh, gee, I'm back to the company commander. He said, "Corporal Watts, you are now the company's Communications Sergeant. Our Communications Sergeant has been in the Pacific now for five years and he's being rotated back home." So I said, "Well, Captain, I'll do the best I can." That's the only thing I could say. So that course in high school in radio construction and communication tilted the balance, it was the thing that got me my stripes.

JW: And I imagine a little raise with all of that?

DW: You talking about money? Oh, absolutely. I ended my service in Tokyo as a Staff Sergeant. There's a corporal, what we called a buck sergeant, three striper, staff sergeant was a four striper, three of them and a curved arc below. Came back to the States and I'd been approached, I was discharged at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And the officers, I remember, that signed my discharge papers, said, "Sergeant Watts, have you thought seriously about the Army Reserves?" And I said, "I've thought about it, but I can't say I've thought about it seriously." We talked awhile about it. To make a long story short, I joined the Army Reserve after discharge from the active Army. And within a year, I had an appointment at Fort Knox, Kentucky. And I walked into the room, there were about six or seven officers from major up to bird colonels behind the desk. And they said, "Sergeant Watts, we'd like to discuss a commission with you." And to once again, to make a long story short, I was commissioned a 2d Lieutenant in the military police in the U.S. Army Reserve. Fortunately, because after I returned from the Pacific, I re-entered college. I had friends that were called out of college for the conflict in Korea, but I was not. In fact, my closest friend, who was in law school, was called back in and spent a year at Fort Knox, incidentally, in the JAG Department, Judge Advocate General's Department. Fortunately, it was just a year. And fortunately, he didn't have to go back overseas. He spent the year at Fort Knox.

JW: So let me make sure I understand, you remained in the Reserves?

DW: Yes.

JW: But you were not called back to fulltime duty?

DW: Not called back for active duty. I remained in the Reserve for several years. And during that interim, I married and had children. And once that happened, you were rarely called back. In other words, married men, family men, they would take all the single men first, so I was never called back into service. Eventually, I was discharged from the Reserves. I don't remember how many years was involved, but several years. 8

JW: Well, the day they made you the company radio man, do you remember walking back and looking at the radio and wondering what -- Did you know what to do?

DW: Basically, yes, because we used some of the equipment, not a lot of it, but we'd had occasion to use some of it in basic training. The communication equipment in an infantry company is really fairly basic. We had actually three types of communications. We had a large radio that was carried with straps that you carried on your back. All communications today to the year 2006, has been miniaturized. What weighed forty pounds then, now weighs a pound and a half. The silicone chip made all the difference in the world. The company radio weighed about forty pounds. It was our basic contact with battalion, the next step up the ladder.

JW: It was battery operated?

DW: Battery operated, absolutely. Now, in the field, we also had field radios that were fairly small. They would weigh like a pound or a pound and a half. And many ways, they were kind of like a wireless remote telephone. In other words, you could talk from one squad over to another squad.

JW: Like a walkie-talkie?

DW: Like a walkie-talkie, that's what we called them, walkie-talkies.

JW: Is this the thing we used to see in World War II shows where they'd crank it?

DW: Yes. Now, the big one, the big radio that we used for contact with battalion or regiment, you cranked. That generated the electricity. We also had field telephones, but the difficulty there was that they were wired, so communication from point A to point B, you had to run a wire. And there were times when that was convenient and possible, and there were times when it wasn't. So really, our communication equipment was relatively basic when you stop and think about it. A radio man is responsible for that big radio. He kind of hangs onto the company commander's shirttails because that man, the radio operator, is the company commander's contact with other companies and with battalion. But a communications sergeant is responsible for all communications within, he's the next step up the ladder, works very closely with the company commander. But he's responsible for the field telephones, the walkie-talkies, as well as the radio man. Fact, there were many occasions where a radio man, due to injury or something, might be taken out of action and the communications sergeant would have to fulfill his job, the radioman's job. But

communications, compared to what we know today, the communications were fairly basic. Fortunately, I cannot remember really having any difficulties at any time with our equipment. It was well made, very serviceable. Course a rifle shot or something like that could take a radio out, but I wasn't exposed to that.

JW: Well, it sounds to me, not knowing anything about it, it sounds to me like it may be a little safer than being a foot soldier.

DW: Well, a little safer, but you were still a foot soldier. I can remember a movie in which the company cooks, in their little white 9 outfits and so forth, were talking to General Patton, he was inspecting the kitchens. And they said, "Well, General, we're cooks." And he said, "No, you're soldiers." He said, "You all have been through basic training and know the use of a rifle. And if need be, you will be on the line with the rest of us." So there were jobs that possibly got a little safer. On the other side of the coin, they were a little more dangerous. I found that there were probably more casualties among the non-commissioned officers and the officers, considering the ratio of officers and non-commissioned officers to just enlisted men, the casualty rate was much higher among non-commissioned officers and officers. A private, we called them grunts or G.I. Joe, what have you. Basically, they're responsible for themselves. But once you become a non-commissioned officer or an officer, you're responsible for a group of men. And sometime that takes you in harm's way where you would not be exposed as just a private. So there are two sides to the coin.

JW: Well, you were on Saipan for how long?

DW: I was on Saipan just a short time, I was there probably less than a month. And the reason being, the big battle at the time I arrived on Saipan, the big conflict in the war was going on on Okinawa, and they needed more troops. The fighting on Okinawa was serious, very fierce. When I joined the E Company of 165th Infantry on Okinawa, there were 65 men in the company. Two weeks prior, they had gone on what we call going on the line at Naha, 185 men went on the line, 65 came back.

JW: Very bleak.

DW: Now, I'm not saying, and they weren't, all those men weren't killed, but that's killed and wounded to the point where they could no longer be of service. So there were thousands of us. I was in a convoy, I don't know how many ships, but the convoy assembled at Saipan and we sailed from Saipan for Okinawa. And as I mentioned, we went in under a kamikaze attack. We went in to what they called a replacement depo, that was just a bunch of tents and place to get out of the

weather. Within just a few days, we were assigned to different organizations on the island that were engaged in combat. And that's when I joined Company E, 165th Infantry.

JW: And the battle for Okinawa was still in progress?

DW: Yes, yes. The primary thrust, it seemed like, I don't know if you can call it Providence, you can give it a lot of names, it's just like, for example, one soldier would be in the invasion force on D-Day. Another soldier might not go in for two weeks. It was just kind of I guess you'd call it the luck of the draw. And of course, lot of it hinged on your age and when you completed basic training, where you were in the pipeline, you could call it a pipeline. And when I was funneled into Saipan, the primary, the worst fighting was over. I joined the company on the line there at Naha. We were there, been so long, it's kind of hard, I don't think we were there over another week, and then we were pulled out and replaced with a fresh outfit. As I say, the company I joined had really really suffered. From there on after we pulled to the rear, the rest of our 10 time on Okinawa, we were involved in what we called mopping up. There were scattered units of Japanese that were behind our lines and in the mountains. I never forget, company commander one day asked me, he said take a couple of men. In fact, it was when we left the line at Naha, Okinawa. He said, "Take a couple of men, Sergeant, and my Jeep, and go back about ten miles or five miles back down the island and find a good level suitable place for the company where we can pitch squad tents and have hot meals and so forth." So I got a couple of my fellows and some axes and stakes and flags and what have you, he told me, company commander told me what he wanted, and I found the ideal place. And it was hot, it was August. Pretty soon, we had taken off our shirts and stripped down to boots and pants and we were driving stakes for what is called a company street. Our company street is a straight street and the tents are pitched on both sides of it facing the company street. We're driving these stakes for the edge of the tents. I have a .45 automatic on my hip. The two men with me had 30 caliber Girand rifles, which they had stacked because you can't work with your hands and carry a rifle. And we're running these stakes and running a line with little flags to lay out a company area. When all of a sudden, we hear a hubbub; and out of the jungle comes about fifty Japanese soldiers and civilians. And man, my two privates that were with me, they made the fastest dash for their rifles you've ever seen. Course, I immediately pulled my pistol and the Japanese soldiers held their rifles over their heads and marched up to us and put the rifles on the ground and surrendered. They were starving to death. They were behind the American lines with no contact with their own organization. They were living off the food they could scrounge in the jungle which probably was pretty scarce. There were quite a few women and children in the group. I'd say it came to a group of about fifty people. So here we are, three soldiers with fifty let's call them prisoners. We only knew one thing to do. I knew where Battalion Headquarters was so we just marched, we left what we were doing and we marched these people, these fifty people, to Battalion Headquarters. Our Battalion Commander was a Colonel. And I never forget the look on his face when we marched into Battalion Headquarters with about fifty prisoners and explained to them, I said, "These are prisoners. They just came up and surrendered." And it was a very odd conversation. He said, "Well, what are you going to do with them?" And I said, "I'm going to turn them over to you." And he said, "Oh, I see." And it was kind of comical in one way. So we turned all these people over, soldiers and children and

women, we turned them over to Battalion and then we went back and finished our job laying out our company area. So you really never knew what you were going to encounter. I remember one day the word came down, Company Commander said, I may have been in the command camp at the time, I don't remember, but the word came down and the Company Commander looked up and he said, "Boys, we've got a big one coming." And I said, "A big what?" He said, "A typhoon." He said, "Word's just come from Navy that there's a typhoon bearing down on Okinawa, and they estimate the winds at a 175 miles an hour." I thought, gee whiz, I've never been through anything like this. So we had a couple of days advance notice. So we 11 dug foxholes five or six feet deep. We put everything of value in the foxholes. We dug foxholes for ourselves. Company Commander had a Jeep. We took big heavy ropes and tied the front bumper on both sides to a palm tree, and on the other side we tied ropes to another tree. And once again to make a story short, after that typhoon had passed through, the company commander no longer had a Jeep, it was gone, and the trees were gone along with it.

JW: Would this be Typhoon Louise?

DW: It's been so long, we're talking about, gee whiz, we're talking sixty years ago.

JW: Was it in the fall of 1945 or '44?

DW: This would have been '45, during the year '45. Was that Louise?

JW: The one that we hear the most about was Louise.

JW: Well, it must have been Louise.

JW: Hit in like September or October of 1945.

DW: Well, no. I went to Japan in September, so this typhoon would have occurred in either July or August.

JW: I see. Well, that wouldn't be Louise.

DW: I had a friend that would have been on the Philippines. And they were sailing for Okinawa from the Philippines. And when that typhoon was over and gone, they were five hundred miles off course. The only thing the Captain could do, according to my friend, was turn the ship into the hurricane and try to keep some motion, some forward motion, regardless of where it took him. Otherwise, the ship probably would have been swamped. But it was devastating. But thank heavens, we were prepared for it. If we hadn't been prepared -- So often and I still read about it today in the paper and on television, and I know what they are because so often I read "Major Typhoon Hits China Coast" and goes through South China. Well, these typhoons on their way to China, go through the Pacific Islands, like Okinawa and other ones, and they're devastating. Only thing you could possibly compare them to would be something like Katrina that hit our Gulf Coast. Because when you have something with winds of a 150, 200 miles an hour, nothing can stand up against that. It's devastating. So my wife and my sister when they was talking about a tornado, they'd head for the closet with their water bottles and radio. I would go out front to see it coming. I'd already been through one. But typhoons, it's nothing really but a tornado.

JW: Yeah, on the water.

DW: Yeah, on the water. And boy, they can build up speed and they can be huge like Katrina. I often have thought and have written in some of my stories, I went into the Army in the fall of 1944 as a boy and I came back a man. I did more living in two years than I know did in the next twenty years. A person cannot really visualize the pace and what goes on in a conflict like the war in the Pacific or in Europe, unless you go through it personally.

JW: Well, this is a good spot to ask you a question that I don't 12 always ask and I probably should. I think you're the twenty-fourth veteran that I've interviewed. And something that I think would have been very hard for me is after two years of adventures and some of these men spent a year or two in a prison camp and you're young and you've been all over the world and you've outran the enemy and been shot at and bombed and everything else, and then you come back and cut meat in a grocery store for twenty years. How can you do that? And I've known a lot of them that did it but I don't know how they did it.

DW: Are you referring to the adjustment after the war?

JW: Yes.

DW: I'm sure for some people it's very difficult. Fortunately, and I think a whole lot of it involves your personal mental make up. I guess I was fortunate in that I really didn't have much difficulty. It took awhile to readjust to civilian life, maybe a year, year and a half, two years. But it wasn't a major

obstacle for me, but I knew others that really never adjusted. In fact, I wrote a poem and titled it, The Sights and Smell of War. And unless a person experiences it, you can have really no true comprehension. And I think as I remember, I ended my poem, "If some day, on a busy city sidewalk, you see a man whose eyes are unseeing and smells of cheap wine, you probably met a man that's seen and smelled a war." But fortunately, I was mentally capable of handling it. Some are and some aren't. Unfortunately, after many major conflicts, when you find what most people would call a bum, quite often they're servicemen. I watched a movie few weeks ago, I was trying to think remember the name of it; but it involved a returning serviceman that'd been in Special Forces. What's the actor's name, Rocky, you know who I'm talking about?

JW: Sylvester Stallone?

DW: Sylvester Stallone played the lead. Did you see that movie by any chance, that I'm talking about? Sylvester, in the movie, he was a return Special Forces and he was just bumming across the country with a backpack. And a Sheriff in the deep South picked him up for loitering or something like that. Well, make a long story short, before it was all over, Stallone had devastated this small town, I mean he just destroyed it. And he wasn't mentally right. You know, general conflict is bad enough, but when you think about a guy in Special Forces that goes behind enemy lines and blows up dams and all that kind of stuff, they have to come back to the States sooner or later. And that's what was his problem. When he came back, he lived haunting dreams.

JW: Well, I had a veteran recently tell me he was one of those guys that just was two seconds late all the way down the line, and it got him in all kinds of trouble. He wound up in a prisoner of war camp because a guy called in sick that morning, he was a tail gunner, and a man in another outfit called in sick, and he goes on his 25th or 28th or 30th mission and gets shot down. And then he just happens to not go to the good prison camp, if there is such a thing, but there's a bad prison camp and he goes to that. And then he goes on the 88 day Black March because he went left instead of right. And then he came 13 home and worked at the post office for forty years. And I just--

DW: You can't help but wonder sometimes and ask why me. I don't remember where I saw this, once again I think it was a movie, and this fellow was called upon to perform a dangerous military act, in other words he was a soldier. And he asked the Company Commander, he said, "Why me?" He says, "Because you're here." This other guy wasn't there, he was there. You can have a man standing as close to you as I am to you. And all of a sudden, he goes down with a shot or a mortar shell explodes next to him and you don't get a scratch. And you say I don't understand this, why him. There may be such things as guardian angels. On Saipan, we were going up the mountain to rout Japanese out of some of the caves. And we were traveling up a very steep ravine. The ravine, the sides of the ravines were probably ten feet tall, it's where water had come down off the mountain and just created a dry stream bed with big rocks in it and so forth. But it was far easier traveling up that gully than the rest of the terrain. We got about halfway up the mountain towards

these caves and machine gun opens up on us from up on ahead of us someplace in the mountains. The bottom of this ravine, there were big rocks in it, but other than the big rocks, it was a sand base, you could just take your toe and move it and it was sand. And I watched those bullets come down that ravine like a sewing machine and they stopped between my legs.

JW: That's too close.

DW: That's too close. But the only thing I could figure on it, as we advanced on up the mountains we picked up that machine gun, by the way; but as we moved on, only thing I could figure was his gun jammed or he ran out of ammunition. But why at that particular point? If I had been five paces farther up that ravine, I would have been hit, but I wasn't. So maybe there are guardian angels out there.

JW: Well, correct me if I'm wrong. Was Saipan where the island women threw their kids off the cliff because they had been told that the Americans were monsters?

DW: I didn't witness that personally. I've seen pictures. But basically, as I remember, it was on Okinawa. There was an awful lot of propaganda spread around World War II. The Japanese and the Germans were the most evil people in the world, to listen to the government reports. And we were exposed, we were indoctrinated with movies during training. And the Japanese were brutal, the Germans were brutal, and so forth and so on. On the other side of the coin, the Japanese had been indoctrinated that the Americans basically ate children, probably told them that we were cannibals or something. But anyway, these women and children, rather than suffer what they supposed their fate to be, just killed themselves, jumped off the cliffs. And of course, as we know, we had a few people that were brutal; but basically, the American soldier was a good guy. We didn't kill women and children intentionally. In warfare, children and women are killed, but it's not an intentional thing. But war is definitely something to be avoided, if possible. And unfortunately, most of the people that get us into major wars, and I'm not talking about just the United States, I'm talking about every country in the world, the people that get you into a war are not the people that fight the war. 14

JW: Seems to be the case.

DW: It is the case.

JW: Throughout the world. When you left Okinawa, well, first of all, did you ever get any kind of a citation for having fifty people surrender to you?

DW: No. I don't think the Battalion Commander even asked me my name.

JW: Well, that's too bad because I imagine there's a lot of soldiers that went through the war and didn't have anyone surrender to them.

DW: Most of them didn't. Once again, it's one of those why me? In other words, I was at the right place or the wrong place at a certain time and there they were.

JW: And if they had come out of that jungle not wanting to surrender, you all were in big trouble.

DW: We would have been in big trouble, yes.

JW: Glad that story had a happy ending.

DW: Yeah. But fortunately, that was not the case. Once again, maybe it was that guardian angel.

JW: Maybe so. Well, after Okinawa, what became of you?

DW: In early September of 1945, I can't give you a day but it was early September, some time probably in the first ten days of September, word came down from Battalion to Company to pack up everything we owned and within about two or three days, we would be flown from Okinawa to Japan. So we had just a couple of days to pack everything that an infantry company has, tents, radios, ammunition, you name it, and we were ready. And we flew into Atsugi Airport in Tokyo, and I don't mind telling you, I had one of the most unusual experiences in that flight. I'm trying to think of just the right words to describe it and it hadn't come to me yet. But we left Okinawa, the plane was heavily loaded with combat soldiers, with everything we owned, including rifles, ammunition, mortars, even our extra pair of shoes, everything we owned was on the plane. And there were a lot of planes and we were on our way to Tokyo. We got about three hundred miles north of Okinawa and we lost one of our two engines. Those old planes, the Army called them Dakotas. Are you familiar with what is called a Douglas, I think they called them Douglas DC-3s.

JW: That's what I was going to guess. That's what I seem to remember.

DW: They had a top speed of a 130 miles an hour, and that thing was loaded. And there's always a wise cracker in every group. And the co-pilot came back, I knew we'd lost an engine, you could tell that by the sound, you could look out there and see it wasn't operating. And I'm looking down at the Pacific Ocean. Co-pilot comes back and says, "Is there anyone back here that can't swim?" What a time for a wise crack. Well, once again, to make this story short, he said, "Fellows, we're in trouble." He said, "Anything that's loose and can be discarded, throw it out." We threw out mortars, machine guns, steel helmets, even threw 15 out our extra pair of shoes. In other words, we ended up the men with the clothes that they had on, everything else went out. There were some benches down the side, we took those off and threw them out. We went over Tokyo, you could almost read the house numbers. In other words, for every mile we traveled, we lost a certain amount of elevation. And we came in so low over Tokyo, I thought we were going to take-- if it had been an American city, we'd have taken down chimneys and everything else. But we made it, it was very-- it was a harrowing flight. (The DVD messed up here, couldn't get what was said.) I'm not kidding, when we hit the coast of Japan, I don't think we were three or four hundred feet in the air. We just continually lost elevation as we moved forward, but we made it. Once again, like I said, I think there was a guardian angel out there that took us in. We would probably have been picked up if we had gone down in the Pacific, I'm confident, you know, because the radio operator on the plane or the co-pilot or someone would give our location. (Messed up again) And course, one of the worst things about going down, and particularly the South Pacific, are sharks. And I've read a lot of stories about groups of men in the water that they had to fight off the sharks continually, and some of them made it and some of them didn't. But we did make it into Tokyo and it was just Providence, is the only thing I can say, wasn't our time to go.

JW: Right. (DVD messing up.)

DW: Tokyo, in the downtown area where I spent most of my time, you had some modern buildings made out of stone and so forth; but residential buildings in Tokyo were wood. And the American bombers would drop these fire bombs, we called them. And with a little wind in those things, they just stand on themselves, it's kind of like a big forest fire, just feeds on itself. And Tokyo, residential Tokyo was destroyed. People that live in a city like New York, maybe Chicago or Los Angeles, can probably visualize, to a certain extent, a city like Tokyo. Tokyo was one mass of humanity. I'm guessing when I was there, the population was seven or eight million. Most of the homes, a house could be the size of this room with five people in there. It's hard for us Americans to visualize this today. And course, those fire storms just cleaned it out. It looked a whole lot, I'm sure most people have seen pictures of Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, and you just see these foundations, one after another, that's the way Tokyo was. Only rather than the atomic bottom, it was fire bombed.

JW: Did you get to tour Tokyo while you were there?

DW: Tour Tokyo?

JW: Yeah. Could you go out and look at things?

DW: Oh, yeah.

JW: Well, what I'm getting to is did you see any of the tunnels and the secret places that I've been told where they would hide airplanes and ships and boats and submarines?

DW: No, no. I'm not saying that didn't exist, but I don't think it existed. As a military policeman, if anyone knew the city other than the Japanese, we probably did because we had patrols all over the 16 city, foot patrols and also Jeep patrols all over the city. And I never did run into anything like that. I did run into a situation of you might call it a tunnel. It happened on New Year's Eve where someone right in downtown Tokyo had lifted a manhole cover and gone down into the city, and he came out three miles away on the beach of Tokyo Bay. Whether he lived or not, I don't know, but he was a sorry sight. But now in France, they built what we called sub pens that would hold a submarine, but they were built with reinforced concrete over them and you didn't even know they were there. I personally didn't see anything like that in Japan. They could have existed. And if they did, the Navy probably knew it, but the Army, we had no experience with anything like that. I found the Japanese to be the most cooperative people that I've ever known. I would tell them through my interpreter what I wanted done and they would bow and do it. They really respected authority. The only difficulty that I was personally involved in, and in one way it didn't involve the Allied troops, but there were a lot of Koreans in Tokyo and particularly one section of Tokyo. And I didn't know it at the time, but oddly enough, although the Koreans were there, a large number of them, the Koreans and the Japanese hated each other. They were just, you might say, mortal enemies. I received a call one day at the city desk. Said, "Sergeant," said, "you won't believe this, but I think we've got a war going on." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, at this point, I'm not sure." But he said, "I've heard machine gun fire, rifle fire," and he said, "it's a bad situation." I said, "Okay." I said, "Just try to stay out of Harm's way and I'll get you some help." I called for reinforcements for this area and we sent a heavily armored troop carrier, which was basically just a big gun platform painted white, military police on the side of it, we sent it out there. Got an interpreter and through the interpreter, I acquired an understanding of what was going on. And it was the Japanese thought the Koreans had done something that they shouldn't or vice-versa, and the conflict started. But we brought it under control within four or five hours. And other than that, I wasn't and we weren't exposed to any what I call violent military action in Tokyo, except that one conflict. And once again, not with us, but between the Koreans and the Japanese.

JW: Well, I've got an odd question for you. One of the few things that my father ever told me about World War II, he said that there was some general when he was in Japan, who had a big Buick that ran on chestnuts.

DW: Ran on what?

JW: Chestnuts. Do you know anything about that?

DW: Not really, but I can believe it for this reason. Course now, here in the United States, we're seeing vehicles that not only run on gasoline, but they'll run on hydrogen, and also run on ethanol alcohol and so forth. Most of the smaller vehicles that I saw in Japan did not run on gasoline. I never did understand all the mechanics, but I remember one and it looked to me like they were burning charcoal as a fuel. And the only thing I could figure is that the heated air from the charcoal was in some way being used to to 17 propel the vehicle. Course there are a lot of ways to propel something, we know you can propel a vehicle or a train with steam. And possibly that's what was going on maybe, it was creating steam. But they weren't using, they didn't use gasoline.

JW: That's always stuck in my mind. I wondered just how on Earth you could get a Buick to run on chestnuts.

DW: We Americans, not only as citizens, but our military, we're accustomed to the best of everything. By the end of World War II, Japan was in very, very bad shape. There was little of anything. One of our major concerns in post-war Japan was what we called the Black Market. A pack of cigarettes was worth twenty dollars. You could buy a pack of cigarettes, an American serviceman could buy a pack of cigarettes at a post exchange for fifty cents, and sell it for twenty dollars.

JW: Twenty 1945 dollars?

DW: Yeah. Think what it would be today. The cigarettes were non-taxed, for one reason; but we did have a black market that started off quite small and grew, eventually assuming kind of a Mafia like operation. And in fact, it was so bad, military police, we had our problems with it; but it was bad enough that it involved a special department that was called CID, criminal investigation. They fought the war against the big boys, so to speak, in the business. You can understand an average soldier buying a carton of cigarettes for fifty cents and selling them to some Japanese for twenty bucks, that's easy enough. I got a call one evening when I was at the desk and it was from a ship captain unloading a ship in Tokyo Bay. And he called and I said, "What's your trouble?" He said,

"We're unloading a ship." I said, "What are you unloading?" He said, "Everything. We've got cigarettes, we've got beer and we've got toiletries, we've got blankets, we've got everything that an Army and Navy uses." I said, "Well, what's happening?" He said, "There are trucks loading it off the docks as fast as we unload it. As fast as we unload it off the ship, they grab it and put it on a truck and are gone." I said, "Who's doing that?" He said, "We don't have the least idea in the world. The only thing that we know is that they're doing it." And he said, "We don't have the manpower to stop it. That's not our job. We're sailors, we're Merchant Marines, we don't have any weapons." So I got on the radio and put the word out for the prowler cars to go down to this certain dock, protect the cargo while it was being unloaded, until it was loaded by the proper authorities. But it got to be a problem, it got to be a big problem. The theft of vehicles got to be a problem. A Jeep or an Army truck is different from the usual American vehicle, truck or car, in that with the average American car, for example, you can lock the thing up, it's locked. You couldn't, there was no locks on the doors of a Jeep. You'd park a Jeep and come back in fifteen minutes and it was gone. In fact, it got to the point where people carried chains around and would run a chain through the steering wheel so the wheel couldn't be turned. But it got to be a problem, and I guess the Black Market eventually became big business. We were not, when I say we, the military police, we weren't equipped to fight it anymore than a small city police department could fight international smuggling. So the 18 CID took over that responsibility, and how successful they were, I don't think you can stop it completely. Seems like every society has its thieves.

JW: Well, anytime you can spend fifty cents and make twenty dollars, that's--

DW: It's going to happen.

JW: It's going to happen.

DW: It's going to happen. Cigarettes, there was no tobacco, the Japanese had no tobacco, period, and they were willing to pay this exorbitant price for tobacco. But there were other items that brought big money. They did not have soap, as we know it, razor blades, as we know them, all of these type of items. Japan, by the time they surrendered, they were truly scraping the bottom of the barrel for everything. They didn't have any gasoline, things that we take for granted were just not available, weren't there, they weren't available, period. So they did command a pretty hefty price on the Black Market and there are always people that will fulfill that need, one way or the other.

JW: Some rush in and fill the void that's been created. Well, how long were you in Tokyo?

DW: I was in Tokyo, let's see, I went into Japan, I was roughly a year in round numbers, maybe fourteen months, but roughly a year.

JW: Do you think by the time you left, could you see improvement?

DW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We helped.

JW: Because you had to get there when it was at its lowest point.

DW: I was there when it was at its lowest, and then I was there while it was being brought back, it took years. But the United States is a very unusual country in that we will wage war against another country and destroy it, and then turn around and rebuild it. There's no other country in the world that will do that.

JW: And Japan turned out to be such a success, such a success.

DW: Oh, yes. Not only Japan, but Germany was a success. We rebuilt Germany. Course in both cases, we had, to a certain extent, an ultimate motive because German and Japan both became allies against our fear of Russia and what the Russians might be up to and what the Russians might do. Japan became our major military ally in the Pacific. And Germany, well, Germany became a major ally, Western Germany, along with France and England, our major buffer against the Soviet Bloc. But we're willing, just like any rock, we destroyed it, now we're going to rebuild it or we're trying to rebuild it and blow it up again.

JW: We got to get the war over before the rebuilding. This isn't working. Did you ever see MacArthur?

DW: Did I see MacArthur?

JW: Uh-huh.

DW: On many occasions, I was closer to General MacArthur than I am to 19 you. My headquarters was two blocks from the Dai Ichi Building, which was, gee whiz, been so long, long initials but the initials stood for Supreme Command Pacific.

JW: I just recently, like two days ago, had to look up that building and it was a pretty impressive building in 1945.

DW: Very impression, yes, it was. Took a moment, but it was back in the recesses of my mind, SCAP, Supreme Command Allied Pacific. We provided military police, we provided military security for the Dai Ichi Building and for the Ernie Powell Theater, and some world famous hotel there. It will come to me in a minute, we provided military security for that. But it was such a spectacle that sometimes when I was off duty, I was only two blocks away, I would walk down to the Dai Ichi Building. Course, we had military policemen there and all I had to do was put on my military police armband. And there were occasions when I opened the door to the building for General MacArthur. And a story I commented, but never once did he stop and shake my hand and thank me for helping him win the war in the Pacific. But let me back up a bit. The Japanese highly respect authority. They looked upon General MacArthur as some kind of a Godly figure, like they look upon their Emperor, looked on him the same way. I would go down sometimes, not only to see the sight, but also because I had been there on duty to watch General MacArthur arrive or depart the building. When he would arrive in the early morning, not early morning, let's say ten o'clock, military police would stop all traffic on a major four lane boulevard. And here would come fifteen or twenty big black limousines, and you never knew which one General MacArthur was in. That's why they had a bunch of them.

JW: Decoys, huh?

DW: Pretty cool. And they would pull up in front of the Dai Ichi Building, thousands of Japanese immediately would assemble like they would in a football game, major football game, just to see General MacArthur get out of that car and walk up those steps and walk into the Dai Ichi Building. And some of the time, they looked at me opening the door for him. But yes, he was an Emperor, no question about it, Supreme Commander in the Pacific. But at the same time, I could recognize the fact that he was a supreme egotist, he was very vain and egotistic. At one time, I think it was in the Philippines, General Eisenhower served MacArthur as an aide, and of course General Eisenhower went ahead and became a Five Star General and was Supreme Commander in Europe. That was even a more major war than we had in the Pacific. Both major, but an equal anyway. Someone asked General MacArthur, and I believe this to be true, they asked General MacArthur what he thought of General Eisenhower. You know his answer? He was the best clerk I ever had. That's egotism, isn't it?

JW: Yeah, yeah, it is. You know, I've had other veterans talk about close encounters with General Patton. And it would be interesting to see whose ego was bigger.

DW: Oh, goodness. I don't know, some of our greatest generals had 20 been supreme egotists. But then on the other hand, some of our greatest generals were exactly the exact opposite. Robert E. Lee, he was the complete gentleman, there was no bombast and all that kind of stuff that you got out of Patton and MacArthur. Unfortunately, MacArthur didn't seem to be capable of realizing that there was one step above being Supreme Commander specific, and that was being the President of the United States. I halfway expected him, when he was relieved of his command, I expected him to run for the presidency.

JW: There was a lot of people that thought that that was going to happen.

DW: But he didn't. Rather, it was Eisenhower.

JW: Do you remember the day that you found out Japan had surrendered, V-J Day?

DW: Yes, the day the Japanese ended hostilities?

JW: Right.

DW: I sure do. I was in the field, it was August, and that spring, I had joined E Company, 165th Infantry, as a replacement. And during the summer, the remaining part of the summer, we received more replacements and brought the company up to full strength. We were preparing, we were running field exercises for the invasion of Japan.

JW: This was in Okinawa?

DW: Okinawa.

JW: Okay.

DW: We had field training, we were preparing to invade Japan. I know there are a lot of people out there that say we didn't have to drop the bomb on Japan, but the Japanese wouldn't surrender. And I know how we felt, we men on Okinawa that were going to have to invade Japan. It was one of the greatest days in our life when they dropped that atomic bomb, and also when they said, boys, the

war is over, the Japanese have finally realized that the war is over and have surrendered, they have faced the unfaceable. It was very difficult for them to surrender. They had never surrendered in the history of Japan, they had never had to surrender, and it was something almost incomprehensible to them to surrender, but they did. And I figure that part of this comes from studies that have been made, but I figure that maybe a half million Americans would have died if we'd had to fight on the home island. And maybe millions of Japanese would have died, I mean millions.

JW: I've had several tell me a million Americans and three million Japanese.

DW: That's probably possible. They were prepared to fight if the Army told them to fight. They really respect authority. If the Army had said we're going to fight and you don't have a weapon, but you've got a pitchfork, go out there and face those Americans with that pitchfork. Think of the slaughter that would have taken place.

JW: Just senseless.

DW: So I certainly remember that day vividly because the word came 21 down, I think I was with the Company Commander when the word came that the Japanese had surrendered. But we were preparing for the invasion of Japan. We've talked about a lot of things, haven't we?

JW: Yeah. Do you think we've summed up World War II?

DW: In our conversation?

JW: Uh-huh.

DW: Pretty much. Only thing really that I can think of was the trip back to the States and discharge from the Army.

JW: You said you remember the name of the ship you came back on?

DW: Frederick Victory, Frederick Victory. We sailed out of Tokyo. And oddly enough, several of my friends were on the ship with me, I mean men that I had known for two or three years. And the worst

part about it was we sailed back what they called the northern route (messed up here again) up on the ship-- I asked one of the -- at this point-- so we were on that northern-- island. I know there were fellows--

JW: Packed like sardines?

DW: (Messed up) Got on with us-- In January of that year, some two, three months later, I re-entered college. So I had that two year interlude and started to college, two years in the military, and then back to college.

JW: Well, I imagine the first week or two you were home in Huntington, West Virginia, it was party day and night?

DW: Well, yeah. Mother cried, she cried, but far less as far as that goes. I was the only boy in the family, one boy, one girl. Soon afterwards, I rejoined my friends that I'd had in high school and grade school, and I said where have you been. Oh, I was in Europe for two years. And how about you? Oh, I was in the Air Force down someplace. But we were all back together and eventually we resumed what I call the life of a civilian.

JW: Were there (mess up) through the war?

DW: Yes, yes, I lost some friends. I lost one, Jack McCorkle. Jack lived about a block from me and he was in the Marine Corps and he died, I think, on Iwo Jima. But I didn't lose a lot of friends, I lost some; and I had some friends that (mess up) the rest of their life. I didn't realize it for awhile. When I first met him, I didn't realize the injuries he'd had, but I had one friend that had lost a good part of one leg. But he'd been rehabilitated and kind of walked along, dressed and everything like anybody else, except he was missing half a leg. Had a part of his ear, lost part of an ear, he was a navigator on a B-29 that went down. And I had an uncle, one of my dad's younger brothers, he was a captain in Europe, and he was back from Europe. And I came from a big family, my dad's family, there were ten children, I had all the cousins, very close family, very close. And within a short distance of time, I was back into the flow of things again.

JW: Back to normal.

DW: And like I say, I did not have the problems that some men had, 22 thank heavens, I didn't. I don't know if some people just are a little more mentally stable than other people or not, I don't know, I don't have the answer to that. That's something for psychiatrists, sociologists, I guess.

JW: Right. Well, you went back to college. What degree did you get?

DW: I went back to a college that was in Huntington, West Virginia, where I'd started, Marshall College, now Marshall University, and I completed my first year. At that point, I made a decision as to the course of study I really wanted and I couldn't get it at Marshall. So I transferred to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and completed my degree work there, took a degree in economics, and gave some serious thought to staying on for awhile and taking a graduate degree. I think I would have except for those two years I lost in the military. I was no longer a kid by the time I graduated from college and I was kind of wanting to get on with my life.

JW: I assume that you went to college on the GI Bill when you got back?

DW: Yes, yes, a wonderful thing. And I'm not too acquainted with veteran's affairs of that type today, but I certainly hope it's available to the men that we send to Iraq and places like that, that they can come back and get an education. I think a good part of what America is today is the fact that we educated those young men that came back from World War II.

JW: Right, right. Because so many of them had never been off the farm. And if it hadn't been for the war, they probably would have never got off the farm.

DW: True, true, this is true.

JW: I've interviewed a lot of them.

DW: Oh, yeah. And of course-- from Alabama and Georgia and Mississippi and you name it. And on the other side of the coin, we had men that were right off the streets from the Bronx, New York. We had a true cross section of America. And some of those farm boys, they were very unworldly. They grew up pretty quickly, though. They became educated men as soldiers.

JW: What an education, what a way to get an education.

DW: I always felt pretty bad about one boy, his name was Robert Vandoosen, little short fellow from Nebraska or Iowa, never been off the farm, and he was married. And you know how soldiers are, they joke among themselves. He said, "I got a letter from my wife and she has left the farm, she's going to Denver to work at one of the war plants." And I said, "Oh, my goodness, Bob." He said, "What's my goodness?" I said, "You're going to get a Dear John letter within six months. She's going to say I've been exposed to the world and I think it's time for us to break up." And dad-gum if it didn't happen. Within six months, she'd written him a letter and said I found someone else.

JW: I imagine there was a lot of that.

DW: There was, certainly was. Course I was single, I was right out of 23 high school, I didn't have any steady girlfriends at that point in my life. Came back from the military and met my wife, Betty Ann Brown, she was a student at Marshall College.

JW: That's where you connected?

DW: That's where we connected. And we were married in 1953, June 20th, 1953, raised two sons. She doesn't mistreat me too much, so we've have stayed together all these years.

JW: What did you do for a living all those years?

DW: I had an uncle, the uncle that was a captain in the Army in Europe. He had worked in a Hudson Chrysler dealership in Huntington. And Hudson had decided that they wanted to split, that they wanted independent dealers, they didn't want the line associated. So my Uncle Lucien acquired the Hudson dealership in Huntington, he had no children. And after I finished college, he wanted me to come into the business with him. We were close family. I was there a few years and he retired, and then I joined another friend who had the Studebaker agency. This could go on for a long time; but in time, I acquired a Volkswagon agency for myself, and I added Jeep to the agency. That was back in the days when we had a car, we called it the Beetle, the Bug, with a radio and equipped, ready for delivery, it was less than two thousand dollars. And we took deposits and say give me your name and I'll call you when I have a car available for you. Not like it is today. We put people on a list.

JW: Right. I remember.

DW: When we got the cars, we would call them and come in and pick up your car, we've got one. Sold every one we could get our hands on. Eventually sold that. That was a young fellow in the dealership, he and two other young men wanted the agency worse than I did. And I was in my 50s by this time and I was thinking about retirement, which I didn't realize until after I did try retirement. But anyway, I sold the agency to these young men. For a couple years, I guess it was, we just kind of did what we wanted to, didn't we, Honey? I remember we took a lot of trips, different things. But anyway, I had another uncle who was a general manager of a Cadillac Oldsmobile dealership in Huntington, big operation. He said you're too young to retire. He said come down here and join me, he said we need help. And I gave it a lot of thought and I did. And I imagine I was there, what, eight or ten years, lot longer than I intended to be, and then I retired, period.

JW: But you've been teaching a writing course at University of Arkansas-Fort Smith?

DW: Yes. I started writing my life story probably ten years ago, something like that. And a local lady by the name of Maxine Eggenberger-- do you know Maxine?

JW: I do.

DW: Maxine was teaching a write your life story course at Westark. It wasn't a college course, it was--

JW: I'm trying to think of the name, I know what you're talking 24 about. Community--

DW: We used the Westark facilities and as they sponsored it, they say it was sponsored by Westark. But I got into that in a big way and Maxine, she wasn't well, and she decided to retire. And she said, Don, would you consider taking over the class? And I did. So, for roughly, what, last seven or eight years, I guess, I've been the instructor in the Write Your Life Story class. It's been quite an experience for me. During this period of time, I've written my life story. But I've helped a lot of people write their life story, including my sister, who retired here and became a member of the class. Haven't been able to get my wife in the class yet, she's a holdout. But it's been a splendid program. It's been very therapeutic, not only for me but for a lot of members of the class. In fact, I've had members of the class say I didn't think I would ever be able to say some of these, write some of these things that I now can write about.

JW: I imagine.

DW: I've written all my war stories in the last ten years. Before that, I didn't talk about it and didn't write anything about it, either. But it's been a very enjoyable experience. I found that I really enjoy writing and all its many phases and types. I write short stories. Just finished a historical novel on the Appalachian Frontier, the first frontier. When we say the frontier, what most people think of the Wild West, America's first frontier was with the Appalachian Mountains, that huge mass that we didn't know what was on the other side. It was a jungle, wild man's country. And that's when my sixth great grandfather came down the Valley of Virginia. He was a pioneer. But I've really enjoyed the writing. Hopefully, I did some other people in fact name was Sarah is a sharp (PICK UP HERE) she was in the class. She wrote her life story, had it published, Searching for Sarah. And in it, she paid me some compliments.

JW: That's pretty nice. Well, Maxine, her name was Miller then, she taught me sex education in high school.

DW: Oh, really? I knew that she had been a school teacher. She's not well.

JW: I saw her, she was awarded the Frontier Achievement Award last September, I think it was, or April. And that was the last time I saw her, and actually was the first time I'd seen her in fifteen or twenty years.

DW: She's had a tremendous amount of trouble with her back. She's had operations and so forth, but she can't hardly get around anymore.

JW: She's a tough old bird, though.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Well, have you got anything else you'd like to tell us? We've got about three minutes left on the tape.

DW: Three minutes left?

JW: Five minutes, maybe. 25

DW: Well, I'll make a few comments about Fort Smith, if I may. My brother-in-law, Dorsey Ryan, and his wife, Peggy Ryan, my wife's sister, lived here in Fort Smith with their family. Gerald Delung and Marcia Delung, two old friends from Huntington, lived here in Fort Smith. And my oldest son in the family and only grandchild were in Dallas. So we visited Fort Smith several times and there was nothing really holding us to Huntington, was there, Honey? So we decided, well, we might as well sell out and move out with the rest of the family. My son and family would have liked for us to have moved to Dallas, but I had enough of big cities in Tokyo. We didn't want anything quite the size of Dallas. And Fort Smith has just been a real nice retirement city. We have a lot of friends, made a lot of new friends. And it's true what they say about the South, the people here are very cordial and friendly, it's been a nice experience. So I guess we'll spend the rest of our days here in Fort Smith. Can't think of anything else of note, worthy of note. Course you can't really cover a life story.

JW: Not in two hours?

DW: In two hours.

JW: No.

DW: In my writing class, I try to convey the thought that writing your story is a life's journey, and that's what life is, it's a journey with highs and lows, days when nothing happens and days when everything explodes around you. But it's all part of life, and I must say I've enjoyed it. I hope it will continue for a few more years. But at eighty, you don't know how many years you have left. So you try to use them wisely, as much as possible.

JW: Y'all appear to be in good shape to me.

DW: I've got some physical problems, carry a little bottle of Nitrostat in my pocket. Have a little trouble sometimes with my indigestion, digestion. Have to be careful. I don't make any sharp turns anymore when I'm walking. I don't have the stability I used to have. The only thing that maybe has not suffered a lot is probably my mind, but I do find I'm a little more forgetful than I was when I was younger. I have what we call senior moments. And what I lack in rapidity of recall, I guess I make up in quantity. But I've lived a long active life.

JW: That's great.

DW: And I appreciate the opportunity, really, to--

JW: I think about somebody fifty years from now listening to this, who really has no concept of World War II. I barely do, you know, people my age barely do; but fifty years from now, it will be like the Civil War was to us.

DW: I think we need to preserve the past. In fact, I wrote a line for my story and that was: We must preserve the past because it's our only insight into the future. 1

JW: Would you tell us your full name, please.

DW: My full name is Donald Gilmore Watts.

JW: Okay. What is your birthday?

DW: July the 14th, 1926.

JW: And what were your parents' names?

DW: My father's name was Jennings Brian Watts, and he was born at East Lynn in West Virginia, and was born in the year 1896. My mother's full name was Willie Mae Witham, and she was born in Sumner County, Tennessee. She was basically the same age as my father, within a few months.

JW: Did you have brothers and sisters?

DW: Had one sister, Joan. Course we all called her Jo, some people called her Joan, and my mother and dad called her Joanne, and she was my only sibling. She married a Dr. Benson and spent most of her life in Texas. But after she and her husband divorced and she retired, she moved to Fort Smith and spent the last ten or so years of her life here in Fort Smith, and she's sorely missed, wonderful woman.

JW: And do you have any children?

DW: I have two boys. I say I have two boys, we have two boys. The oldest is Jennings Randolph Watts. He's married with one son who's fourteen and they live in Grand Prairie, Texas. My youngest son, James Bradley Watts, and wife, still live in Huntington, West Virginia.

JW: And where were you born?

DW: I was born in Huntington, West Virginia.

JW: And is that where you were raised?

DW: I was raised there. I attended public school, wonderful school system in Huntington. Started to Marshall College in Huntington. And about the third month of my first semester, I received a special greeting from the President of the United States, which took me on a two year tour of the Pacific.

JW: And what year was that?

DW: I left the States in May of 1945, sailed out of Seattle, Washington, first stop was Pearl Harbor. The next stop was Saipan. And the major fighting on Saipan had been concluded, but there were a lot of Japanese holed up in the mountains in caves and that was my first taste of warfare we had, routing the remaining Japanese soldiers out of the mountains. From there, I sailed to Okinawa. Landed under a kamikaze attack of all things that blew up the ship next to us, approximately 1500 men disappeared in a flash.

JW: Do you recall the name of the ship?

DW: No, I don't. I recall the name of the ship, believe it or not, that I came home on, that was in 1946. But from Okinawa, we were in training. I was a communications Sergeant and we were in training for the invasion of Japan when the news came that Japan had surrendered. And within ten days, I was aboard an old what they called a Dakota, ² which was one of the early two engine transport planes and landed at Atsugi Airport in Tokyo and spent approximately a little over a year in Japan, most of it in Tokyo proper.

JW: Now, was this after the Japanese had given up?

DW: Oh, yes. I don't remember the date of the signing of the end of hostilities on the Battleship Missouri, but I flew in after that. And like I said, Atsugi Airport is Tokyo's main airport. I was in an Infantry Division, the 27th Division. And the division had been in the war from Hawaii to the end of hostilities. So they sent the colors, deactivated the 27th Division and sent the colors back to the States. And I didn't have quite enough points to come back at that time. So I had my pick of several units to finish my tour of duty and I selected a 720th Military Police Battalion in Tokyo proper. And I worked there as a desk Sergeant until I was rotated back to the States.

JW: Do you remember what kind of work that was? Was it drunken sailors, what did you do at work every day?

DW: I've written several stories. That was the most interesting part of my time in the service. We encountered everything, including things that you couldn't believe existed or would exist. But a desk sergeant, I had what was called a daily blotter. I imagine most people have seen a police show on television where there's a man up on a raised platform with a desk and police officers bring people in and he logs them into a log and states the charges against them and such like. Three other sergeants and I were on a rotating basis, eight hours on and twenty-four hours off, ran what was called the city desk right in downtown Tokyo. I could look out the window behind my desk and look at the Emperor's moat and the Emperor's palace. And two blocks away was the Ghinza, which is the main street in downtown Tokyo. I could see the front of Supreme Headquarters Pacific, General MacArthur's headquarters. I was right in the middle of downtown Tokyo.

JW: The people that you dealt with, I mean the police actions that you were involved in, that was just American citizens or was that Japanese also?

DW: Actually it was both. The way we handled that, I was stationed in the Japanese Metropolitan Police Bureau, which was the headquarters of the Japanese Police Department in Tokyo, that was my headquarters. When we had incidents that involved Japanese, we involved the Japanese Metropolitan Police. Normally we turned them over to the police because the crimes committed were really crimes against Japanese law, rather than American law. Of course the war was over. There were a lot of Marines and sailors and soldiers, Russians, you name it, Englishmen, Canadians, Australians. We were all in Tokyo in what was called the Army of Occupation. And a lot of pent up frustration was released after the end of the war and a lot of it involved alcohol, as you can imagine. We had very little difficulty with the Japanese. The Japanese really respected authority. In fact, I remember one time I was fishing, I'm an old fisherman, and I was fishing in Tokyo in the Emperor's moat of all places. I may have been the first person that 3 ever fished in the Emperor's moat. But anyway, a large crowd of Japanese gathered and I knew something was going on because there was a lot of jabbering. And I had an interpreter with me and I

asked my interpreter, I said, "What's going on here?" He said, "Well, no one's ever fished in the Emperor's moat and they think it might be sacrilegious or some violation of something." And I said, "Oh, I see." I said, "Well, I didn't know this." I said, "Tell them that I am a member of the military police stationed in the Metropolitan Police Bureau and I didn't realize that I was breaking a custom." And he did, and the Japanese, all of them, started bowing to me. And I said, "Well, what in the world did you tell them?" He said, "Well, the Japanese Army doesn't have military police, but they have a special organization called the kempitai." And I said, "The kempitai?" He said, "Are you familiar with the German Gestapo?" I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "Well, the kempitai, the Japanese thought police." And when I used the word kempitai, ahhh, fish all you want to. I told him after it, I said, "Well, I learned something. The word kempitai is really a passport." He said, "Yes, it is."

JW: Well, my father was one of those soldiers in Japan at the same time. You may have had him float across your desk for all I know.

DW: I hope not.

JW: He refused to say a word about World War II when he came back.

DW: I can understand that.

JW: And he died at fifty-five. Maybe if he'd lived longer, he would have decided to talk about it. I've talked to several Veterans who said that just in the last few years that they felt any desire to talk about it.

DW: In the last ten years, I'm now eighty years old, and the last ten years, I have probably written ten to fifteen World War II stories. Before that time about ten years ago, I didn't put down a word; but I was ready.

JW: Well, the reason I bring him up is something went wrong. I mean something in his military career didn't go right and I figure that's one of the main reasons he didn't say anything because-- Anyway, what I am wondering, based on a brother of his that was also in Japan, I'm wondering did you run across a lot of mistreatment of the Japanese after the war was over?

DW: Yes, but little. I did see cases of mistreatment but there was very little. Most of the mistreatment that I saw, well, you can call it mistreatment, but I personally referred to it as brutality,

and it was done by men who had been really hardened by war. I remember a stage show came to Tokyo from the States at the Ernie Powell Theater. And I was in a line waiting to move into the theater, and a soldier ahead of me was smoking a cigarette. And he smoked about half the cigarette and then he just dropped it and it landed by his side on the concrete, entranceway to the Ernie Powell Theater. I should back up and state that tobacco was a great rarity in Japan because they really had no source. They would take cigarette butts and split the paper from the tobacco that was in the remainder of the cigarette. A little boy, he couldn't have been over four or 4 five years old, when he saw that cigarette butt hit the sidewalk, he immediately dashed and reached for it. And just as he picked it up, this soldier in front of me put his foot on the little boy's hand and put two hundred pounds on him, just went like this. That is brutality more than mistreatment. But on the other side of the coin, the men that had been in the Pacific for two, three or four years, had experienced all types of brutality. The Japanese were harsh and brutal, also. And I think most people that are familiar with World War II are familiar with the Bataan Death March. The Japanese Army was quite brutal in their campaigns and their warfare against the Chinese in China and also against the American and Allied troops. So there were a lot of men that were really battle hardened and brutalized to a certain extent. And tell you the truth, I often wondered about these men; fortunately, I was not one of them. But I just wondered how they fitted into civilized society when they returned to the States. Some of the men with which I was acquainted were professional killers, they became professional killers. On Okinawa, we had about six or seven men in my organization, the organization to which I was attached. They didn't pull normal duty. They would black their hands and necks and faces, and after dark, they'd crawl through the lines with a knife in their teeth. They were professional killers. And these fellows, in time, had to come back into a civilized society. I've often wondered about that, how they adjusted.

JW: Well, we've recently had all kinds of stories of brutality in the Iraq War.

DW: Yes, yes.

JW: And I'm torn between thinking that that's a terrible, terrible, terrible thing, which it is, and wondering how, when you train somebody to be a killer, why would you expect them to have tea party manners at all times?

DW: The war there in Iraq is a little different war than the war we fought against the Japanese. We fought against uniformed troops, you knew who the enemy was. The war in Iraq, you don't know who the enemy is. It could be a seven year old boy, he could have a hand grenade under his armpit and walk up to you and you would think he would be-- it's hard to imagine a seven year old boy being a combatant, and women.

JW: I remember that from Viet Nam.

DW: Yes. I read an article a day or two ago there in Yemen, the government captured a group of saboteurs that were going to blow up an oil refinery. And I don't know how they got word of it, but they discovered it and they captured them. And in going through their dwelling, they found all these women dresses, ladies dresses, you know, the mask and all that. And it seemed that these men would put on women's attire and parade as women. The thinking being who would suspect women of sabotage and trying to blow up a refinery. So we're fighting a very, very difficult war right now against radical Muslims. It's a different war. Well, it's organized, but organized in little small cells. One cell doesn't know what another cell is doing. There's no way to track these organizations. It's quite different. But war can brutalize, there's no question about it. Being a former combat soldier, I can visualize a combat soldier in Iraq. He's in a war zone, his unit's being fired on and it's coming from a particular house, so they rush the house. And then entering the house, here are people, men, women and children. You don't know which one of them is going to try to shoot you, so what do you do. You can't stop and say all enemy combatants to the front, please, and you ladies and children to the back. It's not fought that way. It's a very difficult war to fight, the way they're fighting this present war. Luckily, I was able to be engaged with an enemy that was uniformed and you knew who the enemy was. The same was true of the war in Europe.

JW: Well, let me ask you to back up a little bit. Do you remember the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed?

DW: Yes, remotely. I don't remember the specifics and so forth. It was quite a shock.

JW: It's not one of those things that you remember right where you were and what you were doing?

DW: No, I don't remember where I was. Lot of people probably do, but I don't remember. I was of school age.

JW: We run across a lot of Veterans from around here that said, well, I didn't know about it until the next day because we didn't have a radio and nobody around us had a radio.

DW: It was somewhat of a different world in the early Forties than it is today. I guess young people today probably think that computers and television and aircraft and all those type of things were in existence for hundreds of years, but they haven't. I can still remember gathering around the radio in the evening, the family, that was the only really entertainment of that type that there was. And I can still remember a lot of those old programs, Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, the Shadow, and Ma Perkins, it was a different world back then.

JW: But you would have been about fifteen in 1941?

DW: Yes. I was born in 1926, and '41, I'd have been fifteen years old, I was in high school.

JW: So you had graduated from high school and were in your first year of college when you were drafted?

DW: Graduated from high school in June of 1944 and I entered the Army in November of 1944. Went through basic training at Camp Blanding, Florida, completed it in April. I was on my way to the West Coast to travel to the Pacific Theater of Operations, and they gave us what was called a delay en route. I had ten days en route at home and then on to the Pacific.

JW: And you were flown when you went overseas?

DW: No, I went overseas by ship.

JW: By ship?

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DW: I sailed out of Seattle, Washington.

JW: Do you remember the name of that ship?

DW: No, I don't, been too long. There are things that you never forget; and unfortunately, there are things that you do forget. But some of the things I don't think I'll ever forget was we were shipside and we were all eighteen year old kids right out of high school, college, and here's this huge ship. We're in formation going up the gang plank. And the ladies of the American Red Cross were serving coffee and donuts as we passed along, and a band was playing Sentimental Journey. Oddly enough, I sailed overseas to the song Sentimental Journey; and I came back from overseas, listening to the same song, Sentimental Journey.

JW: Well, that's a pretty good song. If you got to have one, that's a pretty good one to have. So you left out of Seattle and you went where?

DW: Pearl Harbor.

JW: Pearl Harbor?

DW: Didn't even get off the ship. We arrived at Pearl Harbor, and over the next two or three days, I would say another twenty-five or thirty ships just materialized, so to speak.

JW: Now, this was before the end of the war?

DW: Oh, yes, this is 1944.

JW: Okay.

DW: No, I take it back. This is 1945, early 1945. These ships assembled there at Pearl and formed what we called a convoy; and from there, the convoy moved to Saipan. And just a note in passing, from where I was bivouacked on Saipan, each morning I would watch the B-29s fly off the little island of Tinian, which was right off the shore of Saipan, a major air base. These B-29s would take off right at dawn and they were on their bombing run over Japan. And right at the edge of dark, we would go out and watch, stand on the beach and watch them come in. It was an all day flight to Japan and return, and look at those planes coming back with holes that big in their wings and rudders shot off of them. And the Enola Gaye that dropped the atomic bomb, flew from this little island of Tinian. I wasn't on Saipan very long before I was assigned to an outfit on Okinawa where the real fighting was going on at that time.

JW: And what did you say they had trained you to be? What had they trained you, what job had they trained you for?

DW: One of the most interesting things in my life is full of little quirks and turns. I arrived on Okinawa and I was assigned to Company E, 165th Infantry. I'd been there about a day and a company clerk came to the tent and said, "Private Watts, the Company Commander would like to see you." I said, oh, gee, what have I done. So I followed the company clerk back to company headquarters and the company commander was there, and he had a folder in front of him. He said, "Private Watts, I see here that you have had some courses in high school in radio communications." And I said, "Yes, sir." I said,

7 "I built two or three during the

course, I built two or three radios." He said, "You're now our radio sergeant, our communications sergeant." No, I take it back. "You are now our radio operator." And I said, "Now, I want to explain right now that my knowledge of radios is very fundamental." He said, "That may be true, but you know more than anyone else in the company." So there's something to be said for education. So I became the company radio operator. And believe it or not, within a week, company clerk was back at the tent and said Corporal Watts now, said, "Corporal Watts, company commander would like to see you." I said, oh, gee, I'm back to the company commander. He said, "Corporal Watts, you are now the company's Communications Sergeant. Our Communications Sergeant has been in the Pacific now for five years and he's being rotated back home." So I said, "Well, Captain, I'll do the best I can." That's the only thing I could say. So that course in high school in radio construction and communication tilted the balance, it was the thing that got me my stripes.

JW: And I imagine a little raise with all of that?

DW: You talking about money? Oh, absolutely. I ended my service in Tokyo as a Staff Sergeant. There's a corporal, what we called a buck sergeant, three striper, staff sergeant was a four striper, three of them and a curved arc below. Came back to the States and I'd been approached, I was discharged at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And the officers, I remember, that signed my discharge papers, said, "Sergeant Watts, have you thought seriously about the Army Reserves?" And I said, "I've thought about it, but I can't say I've thought about it seriously." We talked awhile about it. To make a long story short, I joined the Army Reserve after discharge from the active Army. And within a year, I had an appointment at Fort Knox, Kentucky. And I walked into the room, there were about six or seven officers from major up to bird colonels behind the desk. And they said, "Sergeant Watts, we'd like to discuss a commission with you." And to once again, to make a long story short, I was commissioned a 2d Lieutenant in the military police in the U.S. Army Reserve. Fortunately, because after I returned from the Pacific, I re-entered college. I had friends that were called out of college for the conflict in Korea, but I was not. In fact, my closest friend, who was in law school, was called back in and spent a year at Fort Knox, incidentally, in the JAG Department, Judge Advocate General's Department. Fortunately, it was just a year. And fortunately, he didn't have to go back overseas. He spent the year at Fort Knox.

JW: So let me make sure I understand, you remained in the Reserves?

DW: Yes.

JW: But you were not called back to fulltime duty?

DW: Not called back for active duty. I remained in the Reserve for several years. And during that interim, I married and had children. And once that happened, you were rarely called back. In other words, married men, family men, they would take all the single men first, so I was never called back into service. Eventually, I was discharged from the Reserves. I don't remember how many years was involved, but several years

JW: Well, the day they made you the company radio man, do you remember walking back and looking at the radio and wondering what -- Did you know what to do?

DW: Basically, yes, because we used some of the equipment, not a lot of it, but we'd had occasion to use some of it in basic training. The communication equipment in an infantry company is really fairly basic. We had actually three types of communications. We had a large radio that was carried with straps that you carried on your back. All communications today to the year 2006, has been miniaturized. What weighed forty pounds then, now weighs a pound and a half. The silicone chip made all the difference in the world. The company radio weighed about forty pounds. It was our basic contact with battalion, the next step up the ladder.

JW: It was battery operated?

DW: Battery operated, absolutely. Now, in the field, we also had field radios that were fairly small. They would weigh like a pound or a pound and a half. And many ways, they were kind of like a wireless remote telephone. In other words, you could talk from one squad over to another squad.

JW: Like a walkie-talkie?

DW: Like a walkie-talkie, that's what we called them, walkie-talkies.

JW: Is this the thing we used to see in World War II shows where they'd crank it?

DW: Yes. Now, the big one, the big radio that we used for contact with battalion or regiment, you cranked. That generated the electricity. We also had field telephones, but the difficulty there was that they were wired, so communication from point A to point B, you had to run a wire. And there were times when that was convenient and possible, and there were times when it wasn't. So really, our communication equipment was relatively basic when you stop and think about it. A radio man is responsible for that big radio. He kind of hangs onto the company commander's shirttails

because that man, the radio operator, is the company commander's contact with other companies and with battalion. But a communications sergeant is responsible for all communications within, he's the next step up the ladder, works very closely with the company commander. But he's responsible for the field telephones, the walkie-talkies, as well as the radio man. Fact, there were many occasions where a radio man, due to injury or something, might be taken out of action and the communications sergeant would have to fulfill his job, the radioman's job. But communications, compared to what we know today, the communications were fairly basic. Fortunately, I cannot remember really having any difficulties at any time with our equipment. It was well made, very serviceable. Course a rifle shot or something like that could take a radio out, but I wasn't exposed to that.

JW: Well, it sounds to me, not knowing anything about it, it sounds to me like it may be a little safer than being a foot soldier.

DW: Well, a little safer, but you were still a foot soldier. I can remember a movie in which the company cooks, in their little white 9 outfits and so forth, were talking to General Patton, he was inspecting the kitchens. And they said, "Well, General, we're cooks." And he said, "No, you're soldiers." He said, "You all have been through basic training and know the use of a rifle. And if need be, you will be on the line with the rest of us." So there were jobs that possibly got a little safer. On the other side of the coin, they were a little more dangerous. I found that there were probably more casualties among the non-commissioned officers and the officers, considering the ratio of officers and non-commissioned officers to just enlisted men, the casualty rate was much higher among non-commissioned officers and officers. A private, we called them grunts or G.I. Joe, what have you. Basically, they're responsible for themselves. But once you become a non-commissioned officer or an officer, you're responsible for a group of men. And sometime that takes you in harm's way where you would not be exposed as just a private. So there are two sides to the coin.

JW: Well, you were on Saipan for how long?

DW: I was on Saipan just a short time, I was there probably less than a month. And the reason being, the big battle at the time I arrived on Saipan, the big conflict in the war was going on on Okinawa, and they needed more troops. The fighting on Okinawa was serious, very fierce. When I joined the E Company of 165th Infantry on Okinawa, there were 65 men in the company. Two weeks prior, they had gone on what we call going on the line at Naha, 185 men went on the line, 65 came back.

JW: Very bleak.

DW: Now, I'm not saying, and they weren't, all those men weren't killed, but that's killed and wounded to the point where they could no longer be of service. So there were thousands of us. I was in a convoy, I don't know how many ships, but the convoy assembled at Saipan and we sailed from Saipan for Okinawa. And as I mentioned, we went in under a kamikaze attack. We went in to what they called a replacement depo, that was just a bunch of tents and place to get out of the weather. Within just a few days, we were assigned to different organizations on the island that were engaged in combat. And that's when I joined Company E, 165th Infantry.

JW: And the battle for Okinawa was still in progress?

DW: Yes, yes. The primary thrust, it seemed like, I don't know if you can call it Providence, you can give it a lot of names, it's just like, for example, one soldier would be in the invasion force on D-Day. Another soldier might not go in for two weeks. It was just kind of I guess you'd call it the luck of the draw. And of course, lot of it hinged on your age and when you completed basic training, where you were in the pipeline, you could call it a pipeline. And when I was funneled into Saipan, the primary, the worst fighting was over. I joined the company on the line there at Naha. We were there, been so long, it's kind of hard, I don't think we were there over another week, and then we were pulled out and replaced with a fresh outfit. As I say, the company I joined had really really suffered. From there on after we pulled to the rear, the rest of our 10 time on Okinawa, we were involved in what we called mopping up. There were scattered units of Japanese that were behind our lines and in the mountains. I never forget, company commander one day asked me, he said take a couple of men. In fact, it was when we left the line at Naha, Okinawa. He said, "Take a couple of men, Sergeant, and my Jeep, and go back about ten miles or five miles back down the island and find a good level suitable place for the company where we can pitch squad tents and have hot meals and so forth." So I got a couple of my fellows and some axes and stakes and flags and what have you, he told me, company commander told me what he wanted, and I found the ideal place. And it was hot, it was August. Pretty soon, we had taken off our shirts and stripped down to boots and pants and we were driving stakes for what is called a company street. Our company street is a straight street and the tents are pitched on both sides of it facing the company street. We're driving these stakes for the edge of the tents. I have a .45 automatic on my hip. The two men with me had 30 caliber Girand rifles, which they had stacked because you can't work with your hands and carry a rifle. And we're running these stakes and running a line with little flags to lay out a company area. When all of a sudden, we hear a hubbub; and out of the jungle comes about fifty Japanese soldiers and civilians. And man, my two privates that were with me, they made the fastest dash for their rifles you've ever seen. Course, I immediately pulled my pistol and the Japanese soldiers held their rifles over their heads and marched up to us and put the rifles on the ground and surrendered. They were starving to death. They were behind the American lines with no contact with their own organization. They were living off the food they could scrounge in the jungle which probably was pretty scarce. There were quite a few women and children in the group. I'd say it came to a group of about fifty people. So here we are, three soldiers with fifty let's call them prisoners. We only knew one thing to do. I knew where Battalion Headquarters was so we just

marched, we left what we were doing and we marched these people, these fifty people, to Battalion Headquarters. Our Battalion Commander was a Colonel. And I never forget the look on his face when we marched into Battalion Headquarters with about fifty prisoners and explained to them, I said, "These are prisoners. They just came up and surrendered." And it was a very odd conversation. He said, "Well, what are you going to do with them?" And I said, "I'm going to turn them over to you." And he said, "Oh, I see." And it was kind of comical in one way. So we turned all these people over, soldiers and children and women, we turned them over to Battalion and then we went back and finished our job laying out our company area. So you really never knew what you were going to encounter. I remember one day the word came down, Company Commander said, I may have been in the command camp at the time, I don't remember, but the word came down and the Company Commander looked up and he said, "Boys, we've got a big one coming." And I said, "A big what?" He said, "A typhoon." He said, "Word's just come from Navy that there's a typhoon bearing down on Okinawa, and they estimate the winds at a 175 miles an hour." I thought, gee whiz, I've never been through anything like this. So we had a couple of days advance notice. So we 11 dug foxholes five or six feet deep. We put everything of value in the foxholes. We dug foxholes for ourselves. Company Commander had a Jeep. We took big heavy ropes and tied the front bumper on both sides to a palm tree, and on the other side we tied ropes to another tree. And once again to make a story short, after that typhoon had passed through, the company commander no longer had a Jeep, it was gone, and the trees were gone along with it.

JW: Would this be Typhoon Louise?

DW: It's been so long, we're talking about, gee whiz, we're talking sixty years ago.

JW: Was it in the fall of 1945 or '44?

DW: This would have been '45, during the year '45. Was that Louise?

JW: The one that we hear the most about was Louise.

JW: Well, it must have been Louise.

JW: Hit in like September or October of 1945.

DW: Well, no. I went to Japan in September, so this typhoon would have occurred in either July or August.

JW: I see. Well, that wouldn't be Louise.

DW: I had a friend that would have been on the Philippines. And they were sailing for Okinawa from the Philippines. And when that typhoon was over and gone, they were five hundred miles off course. The only thing the Captain could do, according to my friend, was turn the ship into the hurricane and try to keep some motion, some forward motion, regardless of where it took him. Otherwise, the ship probably would have been swamped. But it was devastating. But thank heavens, we were prepared for it. If we hadn't been prepared -- So often and I still read about it today in the paper and on television, and I know what they are because so often I read "Major Typhoon Hits China Coast" and goes through South China. Well, these typhoons on their way to China, go through the Pacific Islands, like Okinawa and other ones, and they're devastating. Only thing you could possibly compare them to would be something like Katrina that hit our Gulf Coast. Because when you have something with winds of a 150, 200 miles an hour, nothing can stand up against that. It's devastating. So my wife and my sister when they was talking about a tornado, they'd head for the closet with their water bottles and radio. I would go out front to see it coming. I'd already been through one. But typhoons, it's nothing really but a tornado.

JW: Yeah, on the water.

DW: Yeah, on the water. And boy, they can build up speed and they can be huge like Katrina. I often have thought and have written in some of my stories, I went into the Army in the fall of 1944 as a boy and I came back a man. I did more living in two years than I know did in the next twenty years. A person cannot really visualize the pace and what goes on in a conflict like the war in the Pacific or in Europe, unless you go through it personally.

JW: Well, this is a good spot to ask you a question that I don't
12 always ask and I probably should. I think you're the twenty-fourth veteran that I've interviewed. And something that I think would have been very hard for me is after two years of adventures and some of these men spent a year or two in a prison camp and you're young and you've been all over the world and you've outran the enemy and been shot at and bombed and everything else, and then you come back and cut meat in a grocery store for twenty years. How can you do that? And I've known a lot of them that did it but I don't know how they did it.

DW: Are you referring to the adjustment after the war?

JW: Yes.

DW: I'm sure for some people it's very difficult. Fortunately, and I think a whole lot of it involves your personal mental make up. I guess I was fortunate in that I really didn't have much difficulty. It took awhile to readjust to civilian life, maybe a year, year and a half, two years. But it wasn't a major obstacle for me, but I knew others that really never adjusted. In fact, I wrote a poem and titled it, The Sights and Smell of War. And unless a person experiences it, you can have really no true comprehension. And I think as I remember, I ended my poem, "If some day, on a busy city sidewalk, you see a man whose eyes are unseeing and smells of cheap wine, you probably met a man that's seen and smelled a war." But fortunately, I was mentally capable of handling it. Some are and some aren't. Unfortunately, after many major conflicts, when you find what most people would call a bum, quite often they're servicemen. I watched a movie few weeks ago, I was trying to think remember the name of it; but it involved a returning serviceman that'd been in Special Forces. What's the actor's name, Rocky, you know who I'm talking about?

JW: Sylvester Stallone?

DW: Sylvester Stallone played the lead. Did you see that movie by any chance, that I'm talking about? Sylvester, in the movie, he was a return Special Forces and he was just bumming across the country with a backpack. And a Sheriff in the deep South picked him up for loitering or something like that. Well, make a long story short, before it was all over, Stallone had devastated this small town, I mean he just destroyed it. And he wasn't mentally right. You know, general conflict is bad enough, but when you think about a guy in Special Forces that goes behind enemy lines and blows up dams and all that kind of stuff, they have to come back to the States sooner or later. And that's what was his problem. When he came back, he lived haunting dreams.

JW: Well, I had a veteran recently tell me he was one of those guys that just was two seconds late all the way down the line, and it got him in all kinds of trouble. He wound up in a prisoner of war camp because a guy called in sick that morning, he was a tail gunner, and a man in another outfit called in sick, and he goes on his 25th or 28th or 30th mission and gets shot down. And then he just happens to not go to the good prison camp, if there is such a thing, but there's a bad prison camp and he goes to that. And then he goes on the 88 day Black March because he went left instead of right. And then he came
13 home and worked at the post office for forty years. And I just--

DW: You can't help but wonder sometimes and ask why me. I don't remember where I saw this, once again I think it was a movie, and this fellow was called upon to perform a dangerous military

act, in other words he was a soldier. And he asked the Company Commander, he said, "Why me?" He says, "Because you're here." This other guy wasn't there, he was there. You can have a man standing as close to you as I am to you. And all of a sudden, he goes down with a shot or a mortar shell explodes next to him and you don't get a scratch. And you say I don't understand this, why him. There may be such things as guardian angels. On Saipan, we were going up the mountain to rout Japanese out of some of the caves. And we were traveling up a very steep ravine. The ravine, the sides of the ravines were probably ten feet tall, it's where water had come down off the mountain and just created a dry stream bed with big rocks in it and so forth. But it was far easier traveling up that gully than the rest of the terrain. We got about halfway up the mountain towards these caves and machine gun opens up on us from up on ahead of us someplace in the mountains. The bottom of this ravine, there were big rocks in it, but other than the big rocks, it was a sand base, you could just take your toe and move it and it was sand. And I watched those bullets come down that ravine like a sewing machine and they stopped between my legs.

JW: That's too close.

DW: That's too close. But the only thing I could figure on it, as we advanced on up the mountains we picked up that machine gun, by the way; but as we moved on, only thing I could figure was his gun jammed or he ran out of ammunition. But why at that particular point? If I had been five paces farther up that ravine, I would have been hit, but I wasn't. So maybe there are guardian angels out there.

JW: Well, correct me if I'm wrong. Was Saipan where the island women threw their kids off the cliff because they had been told that the Americans were monsters?

DW: I didn't witness that personally. I've seen pictures. But basically, as I remember, it was on Okinawa. There was an awful lot of propagand spread around World War II. The Japanese and the Germans were the most evil people in the world, to listen to the government reports. And we were exposed, we were indoctrinated with movies during training. And the Japanese were brutal, the Germans were brutal, and so forth and so on. On the other side of the coin, the Japanese had been indoctrinated that the Americans basically ate children, probably told them that we were cannibals or something. But anyway, these women and children, rather than suffer what they supposed their fate to be, just killed themselves, jumped off the cliffs. And of course, as we know, we had a few people that were brutal; but basically, the American soldier was a good guy. We didn't kill women and children intentionally. In warfare, children and women are killed, but it's not an intentional thing. But war is definitely something to be avoided, if possible. And unfortunately, most of the people that get us into major wars, and I'm not talking about just the United States, I'm talking about every country in the world, the people that get you into a war are not the people that fight the war 4

JW: Seems to be the case.

DW: It is the case.

JW: Throughout the world. When you left Okinawa, well, first of all, did you ever get any kind of a citation for having fifty people surrender to you?

DW: No. I don't think the Battalion Commander even asked me my name.

JW: Well, that's too bad because I imagine there's a lot of soldiers that went through the war and didn't have anyone surrender to them.

DW: Most of them didn't. Once again, it's one of those why me? In other words, I was at the right place or the wrong place at a certain time and there they were.

JW: And if they had come out of that jungle not wanting to surrender, you all were in big trouble.

DW: We would have been in big trouble, yes.

JW: Glad that story had a happy ending.

DW: Yeah. But fortunately, that was not the case. Once again, maybe it was that guardian angel.

JW: Maybe so. Well, after Okinawa, what became of you?

DW: In early September of 1945, I can't give you a day but it was early September, some time probably in the first ten days of September, word came down from Battalion to Company to pack up everything we owned and within about two or three days, we would be flown from Okinawa to Japan. So we had just a couple of days to pack everything that an infantry company has, tents, radios, ammunition, you name it, and we were ready. And we flew into Atsugi Airport in Tokyo, and I don't mind telling you, I had one of the most unusual experiences in that flight. I'm trying to think of

just the right words to describe it and it hadn't come to me yet. But we left Okinawa, the plane was heavily loaded with combat soldiers, with everything we owned, including rifles, ammunition, mortars, even our extra pair of shoes, everything we owned was on the plane. And there were a lot of planes and we were on our way to Tokyo. We got about three hundred miles north of Okinawa and we lost one of our two engines. Those old planes, the Army called them Dakotas. Are you familiar with what is called a Douglas, I think they called them Douglas DC-3s.

JW: That's what I was going to guess. That's what I seem to remember.

DW: They had a top speed of a 130 miles an hour, and that thing was loaded. And there's always a wise cracker in every group. And the co-pilot came back, I knew we'd lost an engine, you could tell that by the sound, you could look out there and see it wasn't operating. And I'm looking down at the Pacific Ocean. Co-pilot comes back and says, "Is there anyone back here that can't swim?" What a time for a wise crack. Well, once again, to make this story short, he said, "Fellows, we're in trouble." He said, "Anything that's loose and can be discarded, throw it out." We threw out mortars, machine guns, steel helmets, even threw 15 out our extra pair of shoes. In other words, we ended up the men with the clothes that they had on, everything else went out. There were some benches down the side, we took those off and threw them out. We went over Tokyo, you could almost read the house numbers. In other words, for every mile we traveled, we lost a certain amount of elevation. And we came in so low over Tokyo, I thought we were going to take-- if it had been an American city, we'd have taken down chimneys and everything else. But we made it, it was very-- it was a harrowing flight. (The DVD messed up here, couldn't get what was said.) I'm not kidding, when we hit the coast of Japan, I don't think we were three or four hundred feet in the air. We just continually lost elevation as we moved forward, but we made it. Once again, like I said, I think there was a guardian angel out there that took us in. We would probably have been picked up if we had gone down in the Pacific, I'm confident, you know, because the radio operator on the plane or the co-pilot or someone would give our location. (Messed up again) And course, one of the worst things about going down, and particularly the South Pacific, are sharks. And I've read a lot of stories about groups of men in the water that they had to fight off the sharks continually, and some of them made it and some of them didn't. But we did make it into Tokyo and it was just Providence, is the only thing I can say, wasn't our time to go.

JW: Right. (DVD messing up.)

DW: Tokyo, in the downtown area where I spent most of my time, you had some modern buildings made out of stone and so forth; but residential buildings in Tokyo were wood. And the American bombers would drop these fire bombs, we called them. And with a little wind in those things, they just stand on themselves, it's kind of like a big forest fire, just feeds on itself. And Tokyo, residential Tokyo was destroyed. People that live in a city like New York, maybe Chicago or Los Angeles, can probably visualize, to a certain extent, a city like Tokyo. Tokyo was one mass of humanity. I'm

guessing when I was there, the population was seven or eight million. Most of the homes, a house could be the size of this room with five people in there. It's hard for us Americans to visualize this today. And course, those fire storms just cleaned it out. It looked a whole lot, I'm sure most people have seen pictures of Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, and you just see these foundations, one after another, that's the way Tokyo was. Only rather than the atomic bottom, it was fire bombed.

JW: Did you get to tour Tokyo while you were there?

DW: Tour Tokyo?

JW: Yeah. Could you go out and look at things?

DW: Oh, yeah.

JW: Well, what I'm getting to is did you see any of the tunnels and the secret places that I've been told where they would hide airplanes and ships and boats and submarines?

DW: No, no. I'm not saying that didn't exist, but I don't think it existed. As a military policeman, if anyone knew the city other than the Japanese, we probably did because we had patrols all over the 16 city, foot patrols and also Jeep patrols all over the city. And I never did run into anything like that. I did run into a situation of you might call it a tunnel. It happened on New Year's Eve where someone right in downtown Tokyo had lifted a manhole cover and gone down into the city, and he came out three miles away on the beach of Tokyo Bay. Whether he lived or not, I don't know, but he was a sorry sight. But now in France, they built what we called sub pens that would hold a submarine, but they were built with reinforced concrete over them and you didn't even know they were there. I personally didn't see anything like that in Japan. They could have existed. And if they did, the Navy probably knew it, but the Army, we had no experience with anything like that. I found the Japanese to be the most cooperative people that I've ever known. I would tell them through my interpreter what I wanted done and they would bow and do it. They really respected authority. The only difficulty that I was personally involved in, and in one way it didn't involve the Allied troops, but there were a lot of Koreans in Tokyo and particularly one section of Tokyo. And I didn't know it at the time, but oddly enough, although the Koreans were there, a large number of them, the Koreans and the Japanese hated each other. They were just, you might say, mortal enemies. I received a call one day at the city desk. Said, "Sergeant," said, "you won't believe this, but I think we've got a war going on." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, at this point, I'm not sure." But he said, "I've heard machine gun fire, rifle fire," and he said, "it's a bad situation." I said, "Okay." I said, "Just try to stay out of Harm's way and I'll get you some help." I called for reinforcements for this area and we sent a heavily armored troop carrier, which was basically just a big gun platform painted white, military

police on the side of it, we sent it out there. Got an interpreter and through the interpreter, I acquired an understanding of what was going on. And it was the Japanese thought the Koreans had done something that they shouldn't or vice-versa, and the conflict started. But we brought it under control within four or five hours. And other than that, I wasn't and we weren't exposed to any what I call violent military action in Tokyo, except that one conflict. And once again, not with us, but between the Koreans and the Japanese.

JW: Well, I've got an odd question for you. One of the few things that my father ever told me about World War II, he said that there was some general when he was in Japan, who had a big Buick that ran on chestnuts.

DW: Ran on what?

JW: Chestnuts. Do you know anything about that?

DW: Not really, but I can believe it for this reason. Course now, here in the United States, we're seeing vehicles that not only run on gasoline, but they'll run on hydrogen, and also run on ethanol alcohol and so forth. Most of the smaller vehicles that I saw in Japan did not run on gasoline. I never did understand all the mechanics, but I remember one and it looked to me like they were burning charcoal as a fuel. And the only thing I could figure is that the heated air from the charcoal was in some way being used to to 17 propel the vehicle. Course there are a lot of ways to propel something, we know you can propel a vehicle or a train with steam. And possibly that's what was going on maybe, it was creating steam. But they weren't using, they didn't use gasoline.

JW: That's always stuck in my mind. I wondered just how on Earth you could get a Buick to run on chestnuts.

DW: We Americans, not only as citizens, but our military, we're accustomed to the best of everything. By the end of World War II, Japan was in very, very bad shape. There was little of anything. One of our major concerns in post-war Japan was what we called the Black Market. A pack of cigarettes was worth twenty dollars. You could buy a pack of cigarettes, an American serviceman could buy a pack of cigarettes at a post exchange for fifty cents, and sell it for twenty dollars.

JW: Twenty 1945 dollars?

DW: Yeah. Think what it would be today. The cigarettes were non-taxed, for one reason; but we did have a black market that started off quite small and grew, eventually assuming kind of a Mafia like operation. And in fact, it was so bad, military police, we had our problems with it; but it was bad enough that it involved a special department that was called CID, criminal investigation. They fought the war against the big boys, so to speak, in the business. You can understand an average soldier buying a carton of cigarettes for fifty cents and selling them to some Japanese for twenty bucks, that's easy enough. I got a call one evening when I was at the desk and it was from a ship captain unloading a ship in Tokyo Bay. And he called and I said, "What's your trouble?" He said, "We're unloading a ship." I said, "What are you unloading?" He said, "Everything. We've got cigarettes, we've got beer and we've got toiletries, we've got blankets, we've got everything that an Army and Navy uses." I said, "Well, what's happening?" He said, "There are trucks loading it off the docks as fast as we unload it. As fast as we unload it off the ship, they grab it and put it on a truck and are gone." I said, "Who's doing that?" He said, "We don't have the least idea in the world. The only thing that we know is that they're doing it." And he said, "We don't have the manpower to stop it. That's not our job. We're sailors, we're Merchant Marines, we don't have any weapons." So I got on the radio and put the word out for the prowler cars to go down to this certain dock, protect the cargo while it was being unloaded, until it was loaded by the proper authorities. But it got to be a problem, it got to be a big problem. The theft of vehicles got to be a problem. A Jeep or an Army truck is different from the usual American vehicle, truck or car, in that with the average American car, for example, you can lock the thing up, it's locked. You couldn't, there was no locks on the doors of a Jeep. You'd park a Jeep and come back in fifteen minutes and it was gone. In fact, it got to the point where people carried chains around and would run a chain through the steering wheel so the wheel couldn't be turned. But it got to be a problem, and I guess the Black Market eventually became big business. We were not, when I say we, the military police, we weren't equipped to fight it anymore than a small city police department could fight international smuggling. So the 18 CID took over that responsibility, and how successful they were, I don't think you can stop it completely. Seems like every society has its thieves.

JW: Well, anytime you can spend fifty cents and make twenty dollars, that's--

DW: It's going to happen.

JW: It's going to happen.

DW: It's going to happen. Cigarettes, there was no tobacco, the Japanese had no tobacco, period, and they were willing to pay this exorbitant price for tobacco. But there were other items that brought big money. They did not have soap, as we know it, razor blades, as we know them, all of these type of items. Japan, by the time they surrendered, they were truly scraping the bottom of the

barrel for everything. They didn't have any gasoline, things that we take for granted were just not available, weren't there, they weren't available, period. So they did command a pretty hefty price on the Black Market and there are always people that will fulfill that need, one way or the other.

JW: Some rush in and fill the void that's been created. Well, how long were you in Tokyo?

DW: I was in Tokyo, let's see, I went into Japan, I was roughly a year in round numbers, maybe fourteen months, but roughly a year.

JW: Do you think by the time you left, could you see improvement?

DW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We helped.

JW: Because you had to get there when it was at its lowest point.

DW: I was there when it was at its lowest, and then I was there while it was being brought back, it took years. But the United States is a very unusual country in that we will wage war against another country and destroy it, and then turn around and rebuild it. There's no other country in the world that will do that.

JW: And Japan turned out to be such a success, such a success.

DW: Oh, yes. Not only Japan, but Germany was a success. We rebuilt Germany. Course in both cases, we had, to a certain extent, an ultimate motive because German and Japan both became allies against our fear of Russia and what the Russians might be up to and what the Russians might do. Japan became our major military ally in the Pacific. And Germany, well, Germany became a major ally, Western Germany, along with France and England, our major buffer against the Soviet Bloc. But we're willing, just like any rock, we destroyed it, now we're going to rebuild it or we're trying to rebuild it and blow it up again.

JW: We got to get the war over before the rebuilding. This isn't working. Did you ever see MacArthur?

DW: Did I see MacArthur?

JW: Uh-huh.

DW: On many occasions, I was closer to General MacArthur than I am to 19 you. My headquarters was two blocks from the Dai Ichi Building, which was, gee whiz, been so long, long initials but the initials stood for Supreme Command Pacific.

JW: I just recently, like two days ago, had to look up that building and it was a pretty impressive building in 1945.

DW: Very impression, yes, it was. Took a moment, but it was back in the recesses of my mind, SCAP, Supreme Command Allied Pacific. We provided military police, we provided military security for the Dai Ichi Building and for the Ernie Powell Theater, and some world famous hotel there. It will come to me in a minute, we provided military security for that. But it was such a spectacle that sometimes when I was off duty, I was only two blocks away, I would walk down to the Dai Ichi Building. Course, we had military policemen there and all I had to do was put on my military police armband. And there were occasions when I opened the door to the building for General MacArthur. And a story I commented, but never once did he stop and shake my hand and thank me for helping him win the war in the Pacific. But let me back up a bit. The Japanese highly respect authority. They looked upon General MacArthur as some kind of a Godly figure, like they look upon their Emperor, looked on him the same way. I would go down sometimes, not only to see the sight, but also because I had been there on duty to watch General MacArthur arrive or depart the building. When he would arrive in the early morning, not early morning, let's say ten o'clock, military police would stop all traffic on a major four lane boulevard. And here would come fifteen or twenty big black limousines, and you never knew which one General MacArthur was in. That's why they had a bunch of them.

JW: Decoys, huh?

DW: Pretty cool. And they would pull up in front of the Dai Ichi Building, thousands of Japanese immediately would assemble like they would in a football game, major football game, just to see General MacArthur get out of that car and walk up those steps and walk into the Dai Ichi Building. And some of the time, they looked at me opening the door for him. But yes, he was an Emperor, no question about it, Supreme Commander in the Pacific. But at the same time, I could recognize the fact that he was a supreme egotist, he was very vain and egotistic. At one time, I think it was in the Philippines, General Eisenhower served MacArthur as an aide, and of course General Eisenhower went ahead and became a Five Star General and was Supreme Commander in Europe. That was even a more major war than we had in the Pacific. Both major, but an equal anyway. Someone

asked General MacArthur, and I believe this to be true, they asked General MacArthur what he thought of General Eisenhower. You know his answer? He was the best clerk I ever had. That's egotism, isn't it?

JW: Yeah, yeah, it is. You know, I've had other veterans talk about close encounters with General Patton. And it would be interesting to see whose ego was bigger.

DW: Oh, goodness. I don't know, some of our greatest generals had 20 been supreme egotists. But then on the other hand, some of our greatest generals were exactly the exact opposite. Robert E. Lee, he was the complete gentleman, there was no bombast and all that kind of stuff that you got out of Patton and MacArthur. Unfortunately, MacArthur didn't seem to be capable of realizing that there was one step above being Supreme Commander specific, and that was being the President of the United States. I halfway expected him, when he was relieved of his command, I expected him to run for the presidency.

JW: There was a lot of people that thought that that was going to happen.

DW: But he didn't. Rather, it was Eisenhower.

JW: Do you remember the day that you found out Japan had surrendered, V-J Day?

DW: Yes, the day the Japanese ended hostilities?

JW: Right.

DW: I sure do. I was in the field, it was August, and that spring, I had joined E Company, 165th Infantry, as a replacement. And during the summer, the remaining part of the summer, we received more replacements and brought the company up to full strength. We were preparing, we were running field exercises for the invasion of Japan.

JW: This was in Okinawa?

DW: Okinawa.

JW: Okay.

DW: We had field training, we were preparing to invade Japan. I know there are a lot of people out there that say we didn't have to drop the bomb on Japan, but the Japanese wouldn't surrender. And I know how we felt, we men on Okinawa that were going to have to invade Japan. It was one of the greatest days in our life when they dropped that atomic bomb, and also when they said, boys, the war is over, the Japanese have finally realized that the war is over and have surrendered, they have faced the unfaceable. It was very difficult for them to surrender. They had never surrendered in the history of Japan, they had never had to surrender, and it was something almost incomprehensible to them to surrender, but they did. And I figure that part of this comes from studies that have been made, but I figure that maybe a half million Americans would have died if we'd had to fight on the home island. And maybe millions of Japanese would have died, I mean millions.

JW: I've had several tell me a million Americans and three million Japanese.

DW: That's probably possible. They were prepared to fight if the Army told them to fight. They really respect authority. If the Army had said we're going to fight and you don't have a weapon, but you've got a pitchfork, go out there and face those Americans with that pitchfork. Think of the slaughter that would have taken place.

JW: Just senseless.

DW: So I certainly remember that day vividly because the word came 21 down, I think I was with the Company Commander when the word came that the Japanese had surrendered. But we were preparing for the invasion of Japan. We've talked about a lot of things, haven't we?

JW: Yeah. Do you think we've summed up World War II?

DW: In our conversation?

JW: Uh-huh.

DW: Pretty much. Only thing really that I can think of was the trip back to the States and discharge from the Army.

JW: You said you remember the name of the ship you came back on?

DW: Frederick Victory, Frederick Victory. We sailed out of Tokyo. And oddly enough, several of my friends were on the ship with me, I mean men that I had known for two or three years. And the worst part about it was we sailed back what they called the northern route (messed up here again) up on the ship-- I asked one of the -- at this point-- so we were on that northern-- island. I know there were fellows--

JW: Packed like sardines?

DW: (Messed up) Got on with us-- In January of that year, some two, three months later, I re-entered college. So I had that two year interlude and started to college, two years in the military, and then back to college.

JW: Well, I imagine the first week or two you were home in Huntington, West Virginia, it was party day and night?

DW: Well, yeah. Mother cried, she cried, but far less as far as that goes. I was the only boy in the family, one boy, one girl. Soon afterwards, I rejoined my friends that I'd had in high school and grade school, and I said where have you been. Oh, I was in Europe for two years. And how about you? Oh, I was in the Air Force down someplace. But we were all back together and eventually we resumed what I call the life of a civilian.

JW: Were there (mess up) through the war?

DW: Yes, yes, I lost some friends. I lost one, Jack McCorkle. Jack lived about a block from me and he was in the Marine Corps and he died, I think, on Iwo Jima. But I didn't lose a lot of friends, I lost some; and I had some friends that (mess up) the rest of their life. I didn't realize it for awhile. When I first met him, I didn't realize the injuries he'd had, but I had one friend that had lost a good part of one leg. But he'd been rehabilitated and kind of walked along, dressed and everything like anybody else, except he was missing half a leg. Had a part of his ear, lost part of an ear, he was a navigator on a B-29 that went down. And I had an uncle, one of my dad's younger brothers, he was a captain

in Europe, and he was back from Europe. And I came from a big family, my dad's family, there were ten children, I had all the cousins, very close family, very close. And within a short distance of time, I was back into the flow of things again.

JW: Back to normal.

DW: And like I say, I did not have the problems that some men had, 22 thank heavens, I didn't. I don't know if some people just are a little more mentally stable than other people or not, I don't know, I don't have the answer to that. That's something for psychiatrists, sociologists, I guess.

JW: Right. Well, you went back to college. What degree did you get?

DW: I went back to a college that was in Huntington, West Virginia, where I'd started, Marshall College, now Marshall University, and I completed my first year. At that point, I made a decision as to the course of study I really wanted and I couldn't get it at Marshall. So I transferred to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and completed my degree work there, took a degree in economics, and gave some serious thought to staying on for awhile and taking a graduate degree. I think I would have except for those two years I lost in the military. I was no longer a kid by the time I graduated from college and I was kind of wanting to get on with my life.

JW: I assume that you went to college on the GI Bill when you got back?

DW: Yes, yes, a wonderful thing. And I'm not too acquainted with veteran's affairs of that type today, but I certainly hope it's available to the men that we send to Iraq and places like that, that they can come back and get an education. I think a good part of what America is today is the fact that we educated those young men that came back from World War II.

JW: Right, right. Because so many of them had never been off the farm. And if it hadn't been for the war, they probably would have never got off the farm.

DW: True, true, this is true.

JW: I've interviewed a lot of them.

DW: Oh, yeah. And of course-- from Alabama and Georgia and Mississippi and you name it. And on the other side of the coin, we had men that were right off the streets from the Bronx, New York. We had a true cross section of America. And some of those farm boys, they were very unworldly. They grew up pretty quickly, though. They became educated men as soldiers.

JW: What an education, what a way to get an education.

DW: I always felt pretty bad about one boy, his name was Robert Vandoosen, little short fellow from Nebraska or Iowa, never been off the farm, and he was married. And you know how soldiers are, they joke among themselves. He said, "I got a letter from my wife and she has left the farm, she's going to Denver to work at one of the war plants." And I said, "Oh, my goodness, Bob." He said, "What's my goodness?" I said, "You're going to get a Dear John letter within six months. She's going to say I've been exposed to the world and I think it's time for us to break up." And dad-gum if it didn't happen. Within six months, she'd written him a letter and said I found someone else.

JW: I imagine there was a lot of that.

DW: There was, certainly was. Course I was single, I was right out of 23 high school, I didn't have any steady girlfriends at that point in my life. Came back from the military and met my wife, Betty Ann Brown, she was a student at Marshall College.

JW: That's where you connected?

DW: That's where we connected. And we were married in 1953, June 20th, 1953, raised two sons. She doesn't mistreat me too much, so we've have stayed together all these years.

JW: What did you do for a living all those years?

DW: I had an uncle, the uncle that was a captain in the Army in Europe. He had worked in a Hudson Chrysler dealership in Huntington. And Hudson had decided that they wanted to split, that they wanted independent dealers, they didn't want the line associated. So my Uncle Lucien acquired the Hudson dealership in Huntington, he had no children. And after I finished college, he wanted me to come into the business with him. We were close family. I was there a few years and he retired, and then I joined another friend who had the Studebaker agency. This could go on for a long time; but in

time, I acquired a Volkswagon agency for myself, and I added Jeep to the agency. That was back in the days when we had a car, we called it the Beetle, the Bug, with a radio and equipped, ready for delivery, it was less than two thousand dollars. And we took deposits and say give me your name and I'll call you when I have a car available for you. Not like it is today. We put people on a list.

JW: Right. I remember.

DW: When we got the cars, we would call them and come in and pick up your car, we've got one. Sold every one we could get our hands on. Eventually sold that. That was a young fellow in the dealership, he and two other young men wanted the agency worse than I did. And I was in my 50s by this time and I was thinking about retirement, which I didn't realize until after I did try retirement. But anyway, I sold the agency to these young men. For a couple years, I guess it was, we just kind of did what we wanted to, didn't we, Honey? I remember we took a lot of trips, different things. But anyway, I had another uncle who was a general manager of a Cadillac Oldsmobile dealership in Huntington, big operation. He said you're too young to retire. He said come down here and join me, he said we need help. And I gave it a lot of thought and I did. And I imagine I was there, what, eight or ten years, lot longer than I intended to be, and then I retired, period.

JW: But you've been teaching a writing course at University of Arkansas-Fort Smith?

DW: Yes. I started writing my life story probably ten years ago, something like that. And a local lady by the name of Maxine Eggenberger-- do you know Maxine?

JW: I do.

DW: Maxine was teaching a write your life story course at Westark. It wasn't a college course, it was--

JW: I'm trying to think of the name, I know what you're talking about. Community--

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DW: We used the Westark facilities and as they sponsored it, they say it was sponsored by Westark. But I got into that in a big way and Maxine, she wasn't well, and she decided to retire. And she said, Don, would you consider taking over the class? And I did. So, for roughly, what, last seven or eight years, I guess, I've been the instructor in the Write Your Life Story class. It's been quite an

experience for me. During this period of time, I've written my life story. But I've helped a lot of people write their life story, including my sister, who retired here and became a member of the class. Haven't been able to get my wife in the class yet, she's a holdout. But it's been a splendid program. It's been very therapeutic, not only for me but for a lot of members of the class. In fact, I've had members of the class say I didn't think I would ever be able to say some of these, write some of these things that I now can write about.

JW: I imagine.

DW: I've written all my war stories in the last ten years. Before that, I didn't talk about it and didn't write anything about it, either. But it's been a very enjoyable experience. I found that I really enjoy writing and all its many phases and types. I write short stories. Just finished a historical novel on the Appalachian Frontier, the first frontier. When we say the frontier, what most people think of the Wild West, America's first frontier was with the Appalachian Mountains, that huge mass that we didn't know what was on the other side. It was a jungle, wild man's country. And that's when my sixth great grandfather came down the Valley of Virginia. He was a pioneer. But I've really enjoyed the writing. Hopefully, I did some other people in fact name was Sarah is a sharp (PICK UP HERE) she was in the class. She wrote her life story, had it published, Searching for Sarah. And in it, she paid me some compliments.

JW: That's pretty nice. Well, Maxine, her name was Miller then, she taught me sex education in high school.

DW: Oh, really? I knew that she had been a school teacher. She's not well.

JW: I saw her, she was awarded the Frontier Achievement Award last September, I think it was, or April. And that was the last time I saw her, and actually was the first time I'd seen her in fifteen or twenty years.

DW: She's had a tremendous amount of trouble with her back. She's had operations and so forth, but she can't hardly get around anymore.

JW: She's a tough old bird, though.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Well, have you got anything else you'd like to tell us? We've got about three minutes left on the tape.

DW: Three minutes left?

JW: Five minutes, maybe 5

DW: Well, I'll make a few comments about Fort Smith, if I may. My brother-in-law, Dorsey Ryan, and his wife, Peggy Ryan, my wife's sister, lived here in Fort Smith with their family. Gerald Delung and Marcia Delung, two old friends from Huntington, lived here in Fort Smith. And my oldest son in the family and only grandchild were in Dallas. So we visited Fort Smith several times and there was nothing really holding us to Huntington, was there, Honey? So we decided, well, we might as well sell out and move out with the rest of the family. My son and family would have liked for us to have moved to Dallas, but I had enough of big cities in Tokyo. We didn't want anything quite the size of Dallas. And Fort Smith has just been a real nice retirement city. We have a lot of friends, made a lot of new friends. And it's true what they say about the South, the people here are very cordial and friendly, it's been a nice experience. So I guess we'll spend the rest of our days here in Fort Smith. Can't think of anything else of note, worthy of note. Course you can't really cover a life story.

JW: Not in two hours?

DW: In two hours.

JW: No.

DW: In my writing class, I try to convey the thought that writing your story is a life's journey, and that's what life is, it's a journey with highs and lows, days when nothing happens and days when everything explodes around you. But it's all part of life, and I must say I've enjoyed it. I hope it will continue for a few more years. But at eighty, you don't know how many years you have left. So you try to use them wisely, as much as possible.

JW: Y'all appear to be in good shape to me.

DW: I've got some physical problems, carry a little bottle of Nitrostat in my pocket. Have a little trouble sometimes with my indigestion, digestion. Have to be careful. I don't make any sharp turns anymore when I'm walking. I don't have the stability I used to have. The only thing that maybe has not suffered a lot is probably my mind, but I do find I'm a little more forgetful than I was when I was younger. I have what we call senior moments. And what I lack in rapidity of recall, I guess I make up in quantity. But I've lived a long active life.

JW: That's great.

DW: And I appreciate the opportunity, really, to--

JW: I think about somebody fifty years from now listening to this, who really has no concept of World War II. I barely do, you know, people my age barely do; but fifty years from now, it will be like the Civil War was to us.

DW: I think we need to preserve the past. In fact, I wrote a line for my story and that was: We must preserve the past because it's our only insight into the future