



Matthew Potoczek

World War II
China, Burma, India

U.S. Army
124th Cavalry - Troop I
Sergeant

Matthew Potoczek

Veterans
History
Project
Transcript

Interview conducted
May 26, 2009

Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois



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Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Matthew Potoczek**

Rank: **Sergeant**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **World War II - CBI
China Burma India**

Unit: 124th Cavalry - Troop I

Interview Date: May 26, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Place: Group Study Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted here at the Niles Public Library on May 26th in the year 2009. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm a member of the reference staff here. And I'm speaking with Mr. Matthew Potoczek. And Mr. Potoczek was born on September the 25th in 1925, and he lives here in the village of Niles, and he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. And we're very appreciative of his coming in today and being so patient, because we've had Mr. Potoczek on our list to be interviewed for quite a while. (Interviewer's words in italics)

Yes.

And Mr. Potoczek is a CBI veteran. And we don't have-- I think we only have one other CBI vet, so it's interesting to try and get some more stories on a particular sector of the war that's relatively unknown or underappreciated, perhaps, by modern folks.

The CBI, we had the doctors there, we had the medics, we had the quartermaster. It took all those people to supply me on the front lines.

Yes. So far away.

Yes.

So, Mr. Potoczek, when did you enter the Service?

That was in 1944, April.

April of '44. And were you living--?

In Chicago.

Northside? Southside?

Northside. I went to Lane Technical High School. I was eighteen when they-- I wanted to join at seventeen, but my mother and father says, "No. Finish high school." So, I finished high school. And I went right into the Army.

Were you an only child?

No. I had 3 brothers and one sister, Virginia. Stanley went into the Coast Guard. Walter was deferred because he was working on lenses, the Norden Bombsight, the lenses, so he was exempt from joining the Army because he was doing military work on lenses, making these bombsights. Ted was too young, so, he didn't have to go.

So where did you live in the city?

Milwaukee, Armitage, and Western.

Oh, right.

2440 West Courtland Street.

Lane Tech, that is a mighty high school, the Indians!

Oh, I loved Lane Tech. Oh, I played basketball there, football, baseball! I really enjoyed high school. It had beautiful athletic teachers. And all our teachers were just wonderful.

Yes.

Really--.

So, you were in pretty good shape then physically?

Oh, I was physically good.

Yes.

You know, when I went in the Army, I was about 140 pounds. When I got out, I was 95.

We'll have to-- That will be interesting to hear how you lost the fifty pounds, yes.

I lost that because we didn't eat half--, you know, our air supply, the parachutes, missed us, so we couldn't get-- the Japanese got our food.

So were you afraid the war would be over before you would get into the war?

Well, I was hoping the war would end before I got in.

Oh, you were.

Yes, because my parents, they came from Poland, and my Uncle Andrew was killed by the Nazis, the SS, he had a farm there. And my mother cried. And I wanted to join the Army right away, you know, and go to Europe. But it didn't work that way. And I went to the Pacific. Like they say, when you join the Army, they put you where they wanted.

So you wanted to, if the war was on, you wanted to go.

I wanted to go to Germany.

To go to Germany, but if the war was over, that was okay.

Yes. Well, I was hoping the war would end, but it lasted, you know,--

Yes.

quite a while. until 1945, you know.

Yes. So you joined the service then in 1940--?

April, 1944

And you had graduated in?

In January.

Oh, you could graduate in midyear in those days, right?

In 1944, I graduated.

Yes. So you got drafted then.

Yes. I wanted to, really, I wanted to enlist, but my mother and father says no. So, you're at home, you listen to your mother and father. So I signed up for the draft, and then I was drafted.

Very quickly, yes.

Yes. Took me right away.

Yes. So you didn't worry about what branch of service, or Coast Guards, or Marines, or Navy?

No.

Or Army Air Corps?

No, if they need me, I'll go.

Yes.

I thought I was going to go to Europe because a lot of my friends went to Europe from Lane Tech. And Howard Wadell and I went back to Lane Tech to find out where all my friends were, and I went to visit. Howard Wadell was killed in Germany. We graduated together. So some went to Germany and some went to the CBI.

Yes. So you get inducted downtown somewhere, do you?

I got inducted at the post office.

At the post office. And then they put you on a--

The 'L' and we went to Fort Sheridan. And from Fort Sheridan, we went to Fort Riley, Kansas.

Was that by train, or bus, or truck?

By train.

Was that the first time you were ever--?

Away from home.

Yes.

The first time.

Wow.

I'd never been away. Never.

Did you have a hard time adjusting to the Army?

Yes. It was strange. I wasn't used to that kind of a life.

But you were used to being on sports teams.

Yes.

And having coaches and stuff like that.

Yes.

And teamwork, and I suppose that helped?

Yes, it helped, but I adjusted; you miss home; you miss your mother, you miss your brothers, you miss your sisters, but I adjusted, you know, and then when I went overseas, it was even worse.

Yes. Now, you said basic training was pretty tough?

Oh, yes, very tough, yes. You know, forced marches, getting up early in the morning, on the go at the rifle range, shooting down the planes that they shot up there. We had the 30 caliber machine guns, and we had to-- we had the horses then. We had mules then. We had the 30 caliber machine guns, we had to mount them on the mules. And, of course, they used those mules, they brought them overseas with us.

Really?

Yes. To carry all our equipment.

Did--You had a tough drill sergeant, did you mention?

Yes. Sergeant Porter.

Sergeant Porter.

Oh, was he tough! He never let you up. "Get up, get walking!" He says, "Don't straggle! Get in there!" We had the forced marches.

I wonder where he was from, Sergeant Porter?

Sergeant Porter was from Texas.

Oh. Texas.

Yes.

You probably met servicemen from all over the country there, did you?

Yes. Mmm-hmm.

And you got along with most types of people?

Oh, yes.

From New York, Kentucky, California, Salt Lake City, Utah. My friend Dick Miller says, "Oh," he says, "Oh, you're from Chicago." I'm Catholic. He's a Mormon. He says, , "You threw us out of Illinois!" You know, the Mormons--.

Yes.

I says, "Dick, I don't know about this. I wasn't born! My mother and father were in Poland!"

Yes.

We didn't know nothing about, that religion, the Mormons..

Yes.

And he says, "Yes, you Catholics threw us out. We had tough years in Salt Lake City, Utah!" But we're still good friends to this day. He's still alive. He and I spent time in a foxhole. We became the best of friends to this day.

Does he live in Utah?

And he lives in Utah. He's retired, so he's got two homes. He's got a home in Beaver Dam, Arizona. I've been there. It's beautiful. We went to visit him and his wife. But they, his mother and father had a factory. He was the richest guy in our outfit.. They had-- all the rest of us were not poor, but we didn't have the money he had. He had-- their parents had a lot of money.

Yes.

Nice cars, beautiful home. And, in Kentucky, Clay, we called him Clay, we went to visit him. But they had dirt floors for their house.

Yes?

And they had a well out there, an outhouse. He was the poorest of all of them, but we all became very close friends, very, very close.

And you all worked, you all followed Sergeant Porter's commands?

Oh, yes. Yes, we listened to him. He was strict, but--

Yes. So you mentioned you were in a Cavalry outfit?

124th.

124th Cavalry, but you didn't know anything about horses, or mules, or?

Never.

Before then?

But I loved horses. When I was a little kid, who could afford a horse? I was born in the Depression. I was lucky. My mother would send me to school. She would put cardboard in my shoes, because the leather wore out.

Yes.

And that's how bad things were. During the Depression, there were people in the neighborhood committed suicide. I remember Mr. Berkowitz. He lost his job, he lost his house, and he committed suicide. They were very bad times.

Yes.

Heating, and food, and clothing. There was no work. Absolutely.

So, at least in the Army, you got food and clothing of some kind.

The Army was beautiful. They gave you nice clothes and plenty to eat. The only thing, Sergeant Porter was real strict. He made sure you did your beds right, the corners had to be squared off. And those shoes shined! Oh, he kept you going night and day! You know, you were on the go. He never let up.

So there was nothing, there wasn't anything in basic training you had a problem with, though? I mean--

No, we--

You handled it.

We handled it.

And the training, or the--

No, no.

Sharpshooting, or the working with the horses?

Yes, well--.

And the mules? Everything was fine.

When we were on the range, he said, "You got to hit the target!" He says, "Hit the target!" he used to say.

You got to get used to that kick or something, I suppose, right?

He told me how to hold the rifle. I never had a rifle.

Yes.

But then he says, after a while, he says, then he nicknamed me Potsi. I got a nickname of Potsi, because he--, so in the Army they called me, when I was overseas, they called me, and then that name stuck.

The name follows you, yes.

Nickname,, Potsi. Then Sergeant Potsi. When I was in the post office, Potsi, and then that name stuck with me.

Yes. Potsi.

Yes. I worked in the-- when I got home from the Service, well, I'd never had a job.

Right.

So, a friend of mine from, Walter Stovick, he was a captain, and he was overseas in Germany there. And he told me to get in the post office. So, I got a job in the post office.

Yes.

And I was real happy there.

Did-- so when did you realize that they were going to send you overseas to the Pacific and not Europe?

Oh, the Pacific. When we finished our basic training, we had leave. I had to tell my mother, and father, and my brothers and sisters, that, I got a , I think it was two weeks leave, then I had to report back to Fort Riley, Kansas. I says, "I don't know what's going to happen after that. I have no idea." Then we got orders that we're going. We got on the train. We're going to California.

That's a clue.

Yes. So, we went to Riverside, California. And then they gave us all new equipment, all M1 rifles, 45 sidearms, all new boots, everything, new. You know, packs, everything, canteens. They said, "This is your equipment. Take care of it!" Then we-- but they

wouldn't tell us where we were going, what we're-- then they took us to Los Angeles and then we got on the ship, 5000 soldiers on that ship!

Do you remember the name of the ship?

I can't-- I think it's in the report.

In the report that, yes. Mr. Potoczek was very kind to bring us a history of his unit that was written by this Major, Major Stadler.

Yes, he wrote it all. My memory isn't that good anymore.

So we'll add this to the interview.

But I remember there was a troop transport ship. I can't think of the name of it, but then it took us thirty days because the submarines, the Japanese submarines, were there, and no smoking, no lights because at night. If you had a light there, the submarines would sink the ship, so--

Was it hard to pass the time on the ship?

Oh, we were down in the hold there. Four bunks, and we slept on top of each other, four guys. one, two, three, four.

Nobody went crazy down there.

No, no, no.

No.

It was kind of lonesome.

Yes.

No lights, nothing.

During the day, you were allowed to go on deck a little bit?

During the day, we could go up on the deck, and then when it came to eating for 5000 troops. We had to stand in line, but we only ate, I think, it was twice a day, breakfast and one meal in the evening, and that was it.

A lot of cards. Play cards or--.

Yes, then we'd play cards.

Yes.

We had a lot of time.

Were the horses and the mules, were they on the ship?

No, they had another ship for them. We weren't on that.

But they shipped American mules overseas?

Yes, just the troops, and the-- I think the Merchant Marines brought them over, the mules and the horses.

Then we-- it took us quite a few days, weeks, and then we stopped at Melbourne, Australia. So they said we could get off the ship, and then we went walking around in Melbourne, Australia.

Oh, you had to go down under Australia and around?

Yes.

Wow, no wonder it was so long, yes.

And then--

Down under.

We rented bicycles there. We met some girls over there. We went bicycle riding. Oh, you know, you're eighteen years old, they brought us to their home, and they talked to us, fed us. It was real pleasant in Australia. I says, "Oh, this is nice."

And then we had to report back to the ship, and then, after that, we got some more supplies. Then we headed for Bombay, India. And then Bombay was terrible. They says, "Okay, you can go to shore," for maybe so many hours, but it was so bad in Bombay.

Warm? Hot?

Hot, a lot of poverty.

Yes.

Nothing, nothing. People didn't even have food. It was so bad. We said it was better on the ship than it was in Bombay. I'd never have believed that. We had the Depression in 1929, but it wasn't as bad as Bombay was.

Yes.

This was terrible. These people were skinny, rags and bones, in India. I said this was too bad.. And then they'd be begging. I had a little money. I would give it to them.

Yes.

I felt sorry for these people. They had children there. They were begging. That was horrible. I felt that depressed me to see.

Yes.

You know, how people lived. I said--

So, Bombay, you were on the west coast of India?

Mmm-hmm.

Did you go by train then to--

Then we took-- We got onto a train, I remember, and then, from there, we engaged the enemy. The Japanese were all the way into India.

Yes. You went to the other side to Calcutta then, or something, probably, or--

I think it was Assam, India, where we engaged.

Assam, yes.

And then I remember the Merrill Marauders, they called themselves the Merrill--. We were the replacements for them. They were all beat up. They were fighting there first, and we looked at them, we were healthy, they were beat. Oh, I mean terrible, in terrible condition!

So this would have been late '44?

Yes, it was in '44.

Like November or October?

Somewhere around there, let's see, October, yes, somewhere.

Yes.

I'm losing track of the time.

No, no. Yes.

But we were the replacements for them. I mean, they were ragged, their uniforms, their shoes, everything. We had all brand new stuff, all nice clothes, everything. Good boots, brand new. Theirs were ragged. So, we were the replacements for them. Then we engaged the Japanese. We fought the Japanese.

In Burma or--

In this-- in India.

In India.

But we were doing good, because we were well-trained.

What was the terrain like there?

Oh, rugged. It was--

Kind of Mountainy? Hilly?

Jungle.

Oh, jungle.

Jungle. Then we went into--

But you hadn't trained for jungle fighting, though, did you?

No, I didn't train.

No.

Not in Fort Riley, Kansas.

Yes.

So then we replaced the Merrill Marauders. I remember them. Then we had the mules come in later, but we were in combat. We pushed forward. Then the rest of the fellows, they were loading up the mules with supplies, put the howitzers on there. I think they were the 105, they called them Howitzers. That was for backup. And then we engaged the Japanese. We fought the Japanese every day, every day. But we were doing good. We were pushing them back and back. Then I recall some of the towns. Then we went to Burma. There was Myitkina. There was a big battle there. And then we lost quite a few men there. And my Captain Gavel, we lost him. I'd seen him get shot.

He was shot in battle, on the field, the captain?

Captain Gavel. In fact, there is a picture of him, showing Captain Gavel. And he got killed, and a lot of the other fellows got killed.

Machine gun fire? Rifle fire? Or artillery?

By the Japanese. The Japanese they had the-- they had machine guns and then they had 25 caliber weapons. And they shot a lot of our men. And then we had to bury Captain Gavel. We couldn't get to him for a couple of days because we were pinned down. And so let's see. Then we were stuck, I forget how many days. I was in a foxhole there with Frank Pontarrero, Dick Miller. And then we had to split up, one man to a foxhole so we could hold the line, because we lost so many men. And I remember looking out the foxhole, seeing all the dead bodies. We were trying to get them. But then we were fired upon, so we had to go back. So the radioman came there, and, so, we were pinned down. So we called for backup, the howitzers, and then the howitzers would send flares ahead. And we would say, "Is he on target? Is he on target?" He says, "Yes, I think that's where the machine guns are." So they would-- I says, "Send live ammunition then instead of the white flares." It was like-- live ammunition and all of a sudden boom, boom! And they're knocked out, the machine gun nest there. And then we got out, and we pulled out a lot of the Japs that were killed, with our M1s, and the dead, Captain Gavel, and all the rest that were dead and wounded. So the medics, Green was one of the medics, and I got shrapnel right here,

On the bridge of your nose?

Yes. Right here.

On the side?

On the side, and then I--

You were lucky.

Yes, just blood. So I remember-- Green patched me up, and then I talked to the-- and then the lieutenant says, "Oh," he says, "You've got-- your right eye is good because you can still shoot." The lieutenant said that, and I says, "Yes," It's, "it was bleeding, but it didn't affect this eye." So, they patched me up. Green patched me up, and, so, we were doing good then.

This was in Burma?

We were in Burma and we fought-- That was in Myitkina. I remember now the place.

You were trying to open the Burma Road, too, since they weren't--

Yes, we were opening the Burma Road.

Yes.

We were doing good. We were pushing the Japanese back. And I remember Stilwell, General Stilwell, came up the front line. He says, "You guys are good. You're holding the Japs back and you're pushing them back." They nicknamed him Vinegar Joe. He would come in the front line. He was a real good guy, but I don't know who named him Vinegar Joe. But that's the word that got around. And like me, my nickname was Potsi, because they couldn't pronounce the last name too good!

And who gave you that nickname-- that was in?

That was Captain Gavel, he says "Potsi." Then he says, because when we lost our sergeant, then he says, "You're taking over the squad. You're a sergeant now. You give the orders. I give you the orders, and you give your men the orders, the new ones, the replacements." I said, "Okay,"

So how many men were in your squad?

There were about twelve.

Twelve.

In the squad, yes, so we had a-- and then he says, "I want you to take the squad and go up ahead," so I'd have to take the squad. And we went up, and we'd engage the enemy, and then we'd have to fire back, and then we would dig in. And that's the way it went from day to day to day, meet the enemy, and then you engage the enemy, and then you fight. They kill you, you kill them, that was the way life was.

So you must have pushed them back a hundred miles or--

Yes, we pushed them back quite a bit.

Yes.

And we were fighting and fighting in Myitkina, there, Burma.

So you had continuous days of combat?

Every day we had.

It must have been a couple of months, three months.

Months.

Months, and months, yes.

You figure, '44 to then, when we were fighting there. I remember it was, I think it was August of 1945, and they says they dropped the atomic bomb, and that ended the war, so then I remember we had a C-46, a troop transport plane they put us on there. And then they flew us into China, and then there were thousands of Japanese, I don't know if you have the picture of thousands of Japanese? We said, "I hope they know the war is ended!" So, the lieutenant says, "What are we supposed to do with them now?" Then there was Major Blair. He said, "Put them into the race track," We had to wind up, get all the Japanese, and put them in the race track. It's a prison camp.

Where was that, do you recall?

That was in around Shanghai, China,

Wow! That was a long flight from Burma to Shanghai!

Yes, then we flew to-- We got in a C-46. I remember there was, they said Jimmy Stewart was there, the Flying Tigers.

Oh. Yes.

When we were at the air base, I says, "Jimmy Stewart, I knew Jimmy Stewart!" But I never saw him there, but he was a pilot there.

Yes.

The Flying Tigers. I said, "Oh, gee, I'd like to meet him!"

Did you?

No, I didn't, no. But he was on that base, but I never.

But they put us on this cargo plane, a C-46, and we flew over the hump to Shanghai, China. Then we had to take all the weapons away from the Japanese, and, like the lieutenant said, put them in the race track. "Oh!" I says. Boy, I didn't know what was going on half the time! And everything moved so fast. But you just take orders from your commanding officer.

Yes.

So then I have to tell the guys in my squad what to do, take the guns away from them.

*Yes. Why do you think they made you a sergeant, because you had leadership ability and-
-?*

Well--

Experience or--?

Well, I survived most of the-- my sergeant was dead, got killed, the corporal got killed, all the guys in my outfit, and then I had new replacements.

Oh. Yes.

Because the guys in our outfit were killed, so then Captain Gavel says, "Sergeant, you're a sergeant now," like a battle commission.

Yes.

"You're taking over."

Yes.

I says, "Okay, Captain Gavel, okay," so I took over.

Were the Japanese good fighters?

They were good fighters, very good. I remember some of them way up there in a tree, snipers shooting down at you.

Then we were starving. We ate the Japanese food. We were so hungry. They had food, so we ate their food because, our air drop, they missed the air drop. They didn't know where we were, because half the time I didn't know where I was! But, thank God, these officers like the Major, boy, he was good! You know, he knew the terrain. He knew exactly what command to give everybody.

Yes.

So it was continuously fighting.

So your parents didn't know how things were going, did they?

No, I couldn't write.

No.

They didn't know if I was alive or dead. Then my oldest brother, Wally, he got married while I was in combat, you know. And he told my mother that I'm dead, because I used to write a postcard every day, and the letters stopped. You know, cards didn't come for a long time. So my brother says, "I'm getting married. Mary wants me to get married. I know I promised Matt he would be the best man." So, they all thought I was dead. They

got letters from the War Department, your son is missing. We lost contact, from the War Department. They didn't know where I was either, you know. All the people, all these soldiers died. And I'm not able to write a letter. How are you going to write it? There's no way. Who's going to mail it out there in the jungles, you know.

In the jungles, they had the man-eating tigers. We had to kill one of them because they had, and the Kachins--they were the natives of Burma. These lions would go into the village and kill their--

Man-eating tigers, yes.

Yes. Their livestock.

Yes.

And then, oh, I remember, it was Pace. He saw this big tiger, and he took his M1, and boom, boom! So, I saw this big tiger, too, and I started shooting at it. I got scared! And we killed it. It was a big tiger, oh, my God!

And then we went to this village there. I think they were called Kachins and they had food. We ate their food. But they were so happy that we killed this big tiger, so they were very grateful. And then we got the food. But then I gave them in exchange a blanket, an Army blanket, you know, for the food. And I said--oh, they had chicken there. I ate chicken.

But we were fighting over there, and you meet these natives, but they were nice. They didn't care for the Japanese.

They didn't like the Japanese?

No, they didn't like the Japanese.

Because the Japanese were tough or something?

They were tough.

They were mean to them.

And we would help them. We gave to them, we would give them medical supplies to help them out there, and Green said give them blankets then. And Captain Gavel said to give them an M1 rifle to protect themselves.

From the tiger?

From the tigers. I couldn't believe that there was a tiger that big!

Yes.

Unbelievable. From this wall to that wall. Bigger than that with the tail. I says, "Pace!", I says. He shot him. And then I saw him there, and then I started shooting at him. I was scared, but we killed him.

Yes. Was that the only time you were scared while you were over there?

I was scared all the time.

You were scared all the time?

Every day I was scared.

Yes. When you are in that foxhole, and you've got that thin line, can you sleep?

No, you don't sleep.

Or you sleep half--?

You know what? We had a two-man foxhole. One looked this way, and one looked that way, and that's the way we were. One would stay awake, while the other one would get some rest. But you're so scared you couldn't sleep. and then you would catnap during the day to get some sleep, because you're scared at night. So what we did, we put the hand grenades--

To make a line?

To make a line in case they come at night and tripped it. And then the hand grenade would go off. Then you knew the Japs were there. And then you could see in the morning. They infiltrate your line, and you knew you'd killed Japanese, because they would crawl at night, and then we'd shoot when the grenade went off. And then we'd fire in the dark, you know, shoot. Now and then, we'd find dead Japs, maybe five feet, ten feet, away from our foxhole. And that's the way we lived, day after day after day.

So you received your bronze star. Was that for a particular incident, a battle, the bronze star?

Well I--the bronze star, I don't know. I received the bronze star, somebody recommended that I get the bronze star, but I was just doing my duty.

Yes.

I tried to do the best I could. The wounded, we had to carry out the wounded. We saw-- a lot of them had their legs amputated right there on the spot. They were all-- the doctor says, "We've got to amputate." We had to take them with Green, the medic, we took

them back to where the doctors were. There were guys in the outfit were screaming, yelling, but we had to take the wounded back, see, and then the doctors and then Major Blair would say, "You've got to get back to the front line, get back to the front line. We'll take over from here!" So, we left. Green, the medic later died of wounds.

How did you transport them to the back, down in a truck, down the road, a bumpy road?

No, what we did, we put them in blankets or ponchos.

And you carried them?

And we carried them.

Wow!

The best we could.

And then how did they -- Did they have a hard time getting supplies to you when you're--

Then the supplies, half the time we didn't get this-- We were running low on ammunition, too, so we had to go back there and get the ammunition, because they didn't bring it up to the front lines. They were supposed to supply us.

Yes.

They didn't bring it.

Did you mention about parachute drops?

Oh, yes, the parachute drops, and then, sometimes, they'd miss us, and they'd get into the Japanese hands. They got our supplies. So we had to watch our ammunition because we had the 45 calibers, and we had the 30 calibers for the M1s. But we had to be careful. But then we went, for our supplies, then we went to the rear echelon. We'd send some of the guys, like Porter or Pace. We says, "Go see if we can get some ammunition." You know, we're running low. So, they go back there, and, sure enough, they had the ammunition there. And then they had to bring it up to the front lines.

Would that be like twenty miles or--

Well, let's see, they would be behind the lines, maybe five miles or so.

Five miles?

Yes. About five miles, I would say, because we had to take all our wounded back there, because we had the doctors there.

Yes. So when you're pushing the Japanese back, did you ever capture any Japanese prisoners, or did they ever capture any American prisoners?

No. We buried our dead. They never had any prisoners, our prisoners. We buried the dead, because we were winning, maybe we would go five miles or so, and we'd dig in. We were pushing them back, pushing them back. It was a struggle.. This was going on for months, months, months. There was no days off. You didn't know if it was Sunday or Monday. We lost track of the the time, because all you were doing was fighting, fighting, fighting.

No rest and recreation back in Calcutta or someplace. No?

No, no way! You were there to stay. That's what Captain Gavel said. "You're going to be here until the war is over. You're going to be here until the war is over." So, we says, "Let's get this war over!" We thought we could push them back, but we had a lot of casualties, a lot of casualties. And when is it going to end? We don't know. But then I would, if they hadn't dropped that atomic bomb, I don't think I'd be here today, because my luck would have run out, because, you know, how long can you survive all those months.

You're bucking the odds all the time.

Yes.. And then my feet were bleeding from walking, because they're wet, and then I didn't dare take my shoes off, my clothes off, because you never know when you're going to have to be on the move again. So, I never changed my shoes, my clothes. And then you didn't even want to bathe, nothing. Even if there was a stream there. Well, we'd throw a hand grenade in the stream and catch fish to eat the fish.

Blow the fish out of the water, yes.

Out of the water. That's the way we ate them, raw. And that's why I was down to 95 pounds.

Then when the war ended, we went to Shanghai. And then they brought all our wounded, and the cargo to the hospital in Shanghai. The guys from my outfit, I was over there, and then they worked on my eye, and they took a piece of medal out over here. And the doctor then, we had doctors over there, and I'm going around with the bedpans helping the guys who couldn't get out of bed, and helping them, this was after the war. Then I remember Albert Wedemeyer was there, and he looked at me. He says, "Soldier, I've been watching you. You're going around here doing this and that." I says, "Yes." He said, "The men from my outfit," and he says, he went like this, "you're pretty skinny." He says, "I want you to be my bodyguard, my chauffeur." I says, "Okay," so I rode a jeep around Shanghai there. Meanwhile, we're getting-- the Red Cross ship came in to Shanghai, and then they're replacing me, because I was like a nurse in the hospital.

So was Wedemeyer a colonel or a general?

A general. Albert Wedemeyer. I didn't know, when it came to rank, I didn't-- like Stilwell, he was just like a GI. He didn't want to be-- we knew he was a general, though.

Yes.

Everybody was down to earth. So, I was chauffeuring General Wedemeyer. Then we had to go up to Manchuria to get the prisoners, the pilots, out.. You're always busy doing something. So we showed the American pilots, we got them out of prison, and then they brought in these ambulances, Red Cross ambulances, to take all these guys, these prisoners, the American prisoners. There's pilots, they were skin and bones, and I remember, saying, "Oh, my God, how could they mistreat them." You know what I mean. They really treated them-- they executed a lot of the pilots, they took those Japanese swords.

They beheaded them.

And beheaded them, and they told these prisoners they were going to all die, because we are going to rule the world. The Japanese, they told the American prisoners, the pilots, these were mostly all pilots there, and I couldn't believe that they would mistreat them. We took Japanese prisoners, but we never mistreated them. We fed them. They needed medical attention. They got it, but they didn't treat our prisoners good at all. So, then, all this time. I mean, there were so many things I'd been doing all the time.

Yes.

I don't know where the time went, but then--

So you had gone in in April of '44, and you come out in May of '46, so even though the war ended in, I think, August of '45--

Yes, but there's--

You're still doing all this cleanup or whatever in China, yes.

A lot of things. There's a lot of work to be done. It's--there's the sick, the wounded, so many things, and then we had make sure everything was taken care of, all our war dead. We had to go back and dig them up, the ones that died, that got killed, we had to make sure of the grave registration, because I says where the bodies are, we buried them, so we had to go back.

You went back to Burma?

To Burma, and they had a detail. I told them where these bodies were; we dug them up.

Did you say that Captain Gavel was killed?

Captain Gavel was killed.

In Burma?

In Burma. Yes. I remember him getting killed, and I remember all the dead bodies. They all blew up. Oh, the smell, you know, for days, because we couldn't get at them, we were pinned down. And then, somehow, Stilwell got replacements for us. We needed them. You know, we were outnumbered, so we got new blood coming in, replacements, and then when we got enough manpower, then we pushed forward.

But not enough manpower to put in a new regiment and pull you guys out, you guys were there?

No, no, we had--

Because it sounds like you had plenty of combat points.

Yes.

And time in a war zone, yes.

Because we were short of men.

And here I am, I had this patch on my eye. I had a piece of shrapnel in this finger, and I went to a doctor, Doctor Damski. This finger blew up, and he says, "When did that happen?" I says, "Oh maybe sixty years, so there's a piece of metal still in here."

From the war.

In this finger from the war.

Wow.

And I went to Resurrection Hospital, and then I went to another doctor, a surgeon, and they says, everybody was saying, "How long ago was that in there?" I said, "Sixty-some years, this piece of metal."

Quite a souvenir.

Yes. And then nobody wanted to take it out.

Yes.

So they put a needle here, a needle here, and a needle here, and they drew all that pus out.

That's the middle finger on your left hand?

This right here, yes.

Yes. Not your trigger figure.

No, no.

No.

Right here.

Take all the shots on the left side, you can still work with that.

Yes. Because the National Service Officer, he looked my record up, he says, "Oh, yes, they got you." And before I got discharged, they gave me glasses, because I had 20/80 this eye, 20/20 in this eye. When I went into the Service, I had 20/20 in both eyes.

So the 20/80 was probably the results of

The piece of the metal that was in there. The shrapnel. It hit right in the corner here.

The shrapnel comes from a shell, or a bomb, or a--

I don't know. It could have been from a hand grenade. When you throw hand grenades, when somebody throws, they don't throw it far enough, a piece of that metal could hit you. The metal here, when we were engaged with the Japanese, they were throwing grenades at us.

Did their grenades look like American grenades?

No, they were altogether different.

Were they long like a German?

Long like a banana or something.

Yes.

Yes.

So then this-- all this stuff flying all over, and then I got it here in the finger, but this was minor. I would call that minor.

Yes. Yes.

But when the guys get their legs blown that's bad, when they amputate an arm or a leg. That is the sad part.

Yes.

But the food got a little better when you got to Shanghai or--

Oh, when I got to Shanghai, I ate with General Wedemeyer. I ate with Chaing Kai-shek.

Wow! There's a new book out on Chaing Kai-shek.

Yes. I ate with him, talked with him, talked to his wife.

Wow. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, she was quite a person, too.

Yes. Yes. And he even gave me a medal. I don't know what happened to that medal. I says, I told my sister, I says, "I came home with a medal from there that Chiang Kai-shek gave me." You know, because Chinese combat command. So-- but he was nice, Chiang Kai-shek was nice. Then Wedemeyer, he says to Chiang Kai-shek, "We've got a problem," he says, "the Communists--" are taking over!" So, we had to take Chiang Kai-shek, his wife, and all his people, got them on one of our troop ships, and then we went to Formosa. I think they call it Taiwan.

Right. Yes.

Yes. So we went there.

So you were in on that! Wow.

Yes. So, we went to Formosa, took Chiang Kai-shek and everybody. Then we came back to Shanghai. We escorted them there. And then General Wedemeyer says, "Well, it's time for you to go home." I remember him saying that. So he says, "You're going home! Our work is done." So, I got on the ship with the rest of the fellows. And they sent us home.

So you sailed from Shanghai?

Shanghai.

To San Diego or San Francisco?

We went back to California

The Golden Gate Bridge. And we saw that, Alcatraz, and then they put-- then they stripped us, gave us a good physical, the doctors, they checked us over, made reports, did this, burned all our clothes, and then they kept us in isolation for I don't know how long. They fed us good. Then they gave us-- then we showered, cleaned, put on clean, all new clothes before they released us. Then they sent me, oh, not back to Fort Sheridan. I got discharged, I think it was Fort -- oh, you know what, I can't think of this place in Illinois.

Randall, or Rockford, or--

Oh, yes, yes, yes. See, my memory--.

Grant?

It was like Fort Sheridan.

Yes.

So they kept us there, then we got our discharge, then they gave us cash, so much money, and when I got back from there, we got discharged. And we're on our own. We took the train back to Chicago, and then I came home. And I surprised my parents, and then my mother checked my arms, my face, she thought I was missing a leg or an arm.

I said, "No, no, no, no. I'm okay. I'm okay."

So had you been--were you able to send them a postcard from Shanghai or anything?

I did then. Yes. Mmm-hmm. Then I did,. I wrote the letters and cards, and I says, "I don't know when I'm coming home, though." I didn't know. Nobody knew. But let's see. I'm thinking, thinking, thinking, This is going back quite a few years.

Yes. Were there chaplains on the front? Did you have any chaplains or religious support, in a sense, while you were battling in Burma?

No. No chaplains.

You were way out there, yes.

No, no. Nothing. I didn't even know if it was Saturday or Sunday.

Yes.

For me, every day was a day a combat day.

Yes.

Yes. So--

Did you--Was it hard to adjust to civilian life, when you made it home, for a while?

It was. It was. I belonged to-- I joined the VFW with other guys. Walter Stovick, he was a captain in Germany there. He fought in Normandy, Germany. And he was in the post office before he went into the war, and he talked to me at one of the meetings, and he says, "What are you going to do?" I says, "I don't know what I want to do," I says, "I'm lost," I says. I had training at Lane Tech. I was working at sixteen. I got a social security card. I worked in the machine shop making the floor equipment.. I ran a lathe and a milling machine and things like that. We were doing work for the Navy. We're doing this, Mr. Schwartz says it's all military that we were working for, so, from sixteen to eighteen, I worked two years in the machine shop. So I says, "I don't know if I can go back to the machine shop." And so he says, "Why don't you try the post office?" So, I went in the post office, and I says, "Boy, all these letters!," And then there's eighty carriers at Lakeview, and then John Norman, the superintendent, says, he says, "Here's a scheme sheet. There's eighty carriers." And then I had to memorize it. I pick up a letter, and I'd look at the scheme sheet. Oh, it goes to Carrier Number 7. And then I look at the scheme sheet. I pick up another letter. I had to memorize all this, but that was good for me.

Yes.

It took my mind off the past.

Yes.

I had something to learn. I'm learning the scheme, the Lakeview scheme. That's from Diversey to Montrose, Lake Shore to Damen, all in that area. I said, "This is different,". It is good for me! I'm thinking about the letters. It took my mind off the war. So I'm sorting this mail out, learning this scheme. Then I go out. I'm carrying the mail. Then he says, "We got mail, collections, for collections." Then I'm on collections, parcel post. I had an Army truck. He says, "Oh, wait. You can't drive an Army truck. You've got to have a license." I says, "I got a license from the Army. They gave me a license." And then they--so, he says, "Good. Take the truck out. Deliver parcel post on Lake Shore Drive."

You're doing everything!

Yes. I'm doing everything. I was a clerk carrier. Oh, I loved it! I says, "I worked the window. I sell stamps. I weigh packages." I said, "Oh, this is nice!" I loved it. It took my mind off the war. And I could work eight hours, nine hours, ten hours. Our-- the shifts were always short. They needed help. They needed help. So I got paid, I says, "Boy, they pay you!" When I'm in the Army, I didn't get paid for all the extra work. I says, "This is nice!" I'm making money, And I says, "This is very good."

And then, like in the Army, you got fifty dollars a month, but when I was overseas they didn't pay me. There's nobody to pay you. So, I got, in the Army, they gave me a lump

sum. They figured, oh, the financial officer was trying to figure out what my pay was, because he says, "You're going to get paid overseas pay. You're going to get combat infantry pay. You're going to get sergeant's pay." This guy was figuring this all out. And then I says, "Well, whatever it is," "How many days were you there?" this and that, so we figured it out. I got close to three thousand dollars.

And that was money!

Yes. That's three thousand dollars, a lump sum. So I put that in the bank, the three thousand dollars, I says, "Oh, this is nice; I'll be able to buy clothes and jackets," and then I says, "Well, the income tax." He says, "No, you don't pay income tax on this. Truman gave an order. You're exempt from income tax." I says, "Oh, because when I was working at sixteen, I paid income tax."

Yes. Yes.

You know, social security and all that.

He says, "No, this is all yours." So, they gave me a check, a lump sum. Then I get in the post office, and I'm making money there. I says, "Oh, my God! I'm really well off here."

Yes.

You know, I'm doing good! And then they gave me a uniform allowance. They paid for my uniform, too. I says, "Well, I got a free uniform in the Army, a free uniform in the post office."

So how many years did you work for the post office?

Forty-three years.

Forty-three years.

Mmm-hmm.

All in Lakeview?

All in Lakeview.

Boy, you must know Lakeview pretty well!

I knew everybody, everybody in there. I delivered every block in Lakeview. When I retired, they gave me the biggest party, the people where I delivered the mail, a big beautiful party. The post office gave me a big party.. I says, "Oh, my!" I didn't want to retire, but my wife was sick, very sick. She needed care. She said, "Matt, this is it. I know you love your job. But I need you at home."

Yes.

You know, she had diabetes bad. She had two open-heart surgeries, the aortic valve and the mitral valve. So she was very, very sick.

Had you met your wife after the war?

I knew her before the war. We were-- we went to school together.

To grammar school together?

To grammar school.

Which grammar school was that?

Chase School.

Chase School.

Yes, but she was in Tuley High School. I went to Lane Tech.

Because Lane Tech was all boys at that time, yes.

Yes, all boys, but we were neighbors.

Was she Polish, a Polish background?

Oh, sure.

Yes.

So, I knew her all my life and then--

So, she saw you in a uniform then.

Oh, yes.

Oh, yes?

Yes.

She must have been worried about you, too, while you were away.

Oh, yes, yes. And then I didn't want to get married right away because-- "you want to at least get settled down."

Yes.

You know, and I wasn't ready for marriage, but then later in life, well, she waited for me. We went out all the time, but I didn't want to get really married. I says, you know, "Let me settle down here."

Yes.

You know, because when you get married, you've got to pay, you've got to get--

your own place. And then you've got a wife to support, and everything, and then, too, even when we moved out to Niles, there's a mortgage and everything.

Yes, so when did you get married, if I may ask?

I was thirty-one years old when I got married.

That was

1961.

Yes. And then, did you move to Niles then?

Then we moved to Niles. Her girlfriend lived out here, and she says, "Gee, there's a nice house for sale." So, we came out and looked at it. She loved it. We gave a handshake. We're going to buy it just with a handshake. And, so, then I had a little money saved, because I didn't want to get married and not have money.

Sure.

You know, because it just doesn't work.

So I went and got a mortgage. And Mr. Gerski gave me the mortgage on the house, and the house was \$22,000, if I can recall, \$22, 000 for the house. Jeannie says. "I love it! I love it!" So, I says, "Okay, we're going to buy it." So, I had a little money saved for a down payment, and the rest was the mortgage.

That took you longer to get to work then?

Yes, ten miles.

But I worked a lot of overtime in the post office. Overtime, overtime! We doubled the payments, so that, hey, everything's beautiful now. Now, the whole world is opening up! I'm really living. "Oh, God," I says, "This is the life!"

Yes.

Nice wife, good job.

Well, I'll say you had it coming. You earned it. You earned it.

I says, "I can't believe it," says, "You walk in the streets. Nobody's shooting at you. You stop in a restaurant. You have your coffee. You want a sandwich, you have a sandwich." I said, "This is living."

Yes.

I really enjoyed it. After the war, I was lucky, but a lot of my friends lost, like Wes Strom, he lost both legs. And we were helping him out to get around, to pick him up, take him here. Another friend of ours, they were carpenters, and they made a ramp going into his house. General Motors gave him an Oldsmobile with a steering wheel with the brakes and the gas up by the steering wheel. So he became independent. He says, "I don't need you guys to chauffeur me around. I got a car!" I says, "Okay, Wes." And then he would brag. He says, "See these brand new shoes."

That's funny!

He's got two artificial legs.

He's got real shoes, yes.

So we had these meetings, you know. We would get together.

The VFW or the--?

That was-- We called ourselves Chicago Veterans of Overseas.

Wes was the commanding officer and the Nasnaks were the secretaries. We hit the neighborhood group.

Did Wes hurt-- lose his limbs in Europe or Asia?

He lost his, he was in the CBI too.

Oh, yes. But not in your unit?

Not in my unit.

Yes. Yes.

And he lost his legs over there and, well, we had a lot of guys in our outfit that lost their limbs.

And then I belonged to the American Legion Franklin Delano Roosevelt Post. I belonged to all these different posts here, there, And then my wife would say, "I don't mind you going out," she says, "but be careful with drinking,"

Yes.

"You drink," she said, "I don't want you drinking." Because my wife didn't drink. She did not drink. So, I used to be very careful. If I had a beer, I'd sip it. I wouldn't take no more than one beer. She says, "I don't want you getting drunk. Now, don't get drunk." I said, "Okay." So, a lot of times, I'd go out, I would just drink ginger ale. or 7-Up, or something like that.

Yes.

Because my wife didn't want me drinking.

Yes.

You know, because you can get carried away with drinking. So, I says, "Okay, I want to listen to you."

Yes.

Yes. I had a beautiful wife. I've even got a picture of her here. Oh, she was out of this world!

Oh, yes.

Just the best thing of my life when I married.

Thank you. Thank you. That was Jeannie?

Jeannie.

Yes.

I'm telling you, she was number one, number one! But she had problems. We had one boy, Paul, in our marriage. And beautiful baby. But what happened, premature, the lungs were not--

Developed, yes.

And so he was in an incubator, was in the hospital, and when I went to see him, he would cry. "The lungs," I says, "he's got good lungs then, if he can cry like that."

Yes.

But the lungs were not developed. Three months later, he passed away, so we buried little Paul at the foot of my mother and father's grave. Because Ben Malec and Monica Malec, Monica Malec is my cousin, she married the undertaker, Ben Malec, in Chicago, so I went to see Monica and Ben. And they says they got the call. I says, "You handle it." So, they picked the baby up, put the baby in the coffin. But he says, "This is a private wake," it would be a private wake.

Yes.

And they handled everything. And I talked to my wife; what should we do? Well, we had the baby baptized before he died, because my wife was very religious.

Yes.

A good Catholic, very good Catholic. And she says, well, okay, have baby Paul buried at the foot of my mother and father's grave.

Yes.

So were you in Saint John Brebeuf Parish here?

At Saint John Brebeuf--No, this happened in Chicago.

In Chicago. This was before you moved out here?

Because I was married in St. Sylvester's Church over there. But then I had to go to Pre-Cana. And then I had confessions, and I told the priest, "Maybe you won't marry me." And he says, "Why?" "Well, I'm here to confess I killed people, Japanese." He says, "Oh, my God!" And he says, "How many Japanese did you kill?" And I says, "I don't remember." I didn't. I really don't, you know, I never kept count. I told him, "I don't know, a lot of them." I says, "You won't," I told him, "You probably won't marry us in church, because I'm considered a murderer." He says, "No! You're going to get married in church!" And I says, "Yes?" He says, "You were fighting the evil empire. You were doing God's work." Oh, my God, that made me feel good!

Yes.

I says--. Oh, I told him the truth. And I even told Jeannie, you know. I never told her about the war.

Yes.

I never discussed that, the war, with her. And I says, "The priest gave me the okay."

What was his name, Father?

Father Las. Young priest, nice guy. He was, you know, maybe if I would have, I had a young, he was real compassionate, very understanding.

Yes.

And then later, then I drank a little beer. He smelled it on me.

He says, "You've been drinking."

I says, "Oh, yes. I had a beer." And he says, "I'd like to have a beer, too." So, he brings out a bottle of beer, and we're sitting there drinking. And we're talking about the old days and everything. And I said, "Oh, boy, I'm glad I'm getting married by you. You're a real good priest." Yes, Father Las. Real good. You know, that was Pre-Cana. That was it. They're telling you about marriage.

Yes.

It's not an easy life to get married. They're warning, you see, and then you make your confessions and all that. I still do. I go to Saint John and confess if I do something wrong.

Yes.

I confess, but I don't try to do anything wrong. I try to be good.

Yes. Well, it sounds like you didn't do anything wrong while you were in the Army!

Well, it did bother me, though.

Oh, of course.

The killing.

Yes, the killing.

It's either kill or be killed.

Yes.

And if I didn't kill, they would kill my people in the back lines. There's the doctors, there's the medics. They would kill them all. They had no mercy. Like when I belonged

to the disabled American veterans, I joined that club, too, they were telling me about that Bataan match.

Oh.

How they killed these guys that couldn't walk anymore. They just pushed them on the side of the road and killed them, bayoneted them, horror stories that the Japanese did. People don't realize how mean they were. The Americans were never that way. If we took prisoners, we treated them good. We fed them. We didn't abuse them. We weren't brought up that way.

Yes.

See, but when you listen to the stories from all these other veterans, the Japanese weren't good people, no, no. At least, Americans had compassion. When we took prisoners of war, we took care of them. They worked in our camps. Like the prisoners of war from Germany in Fort Riley, Kansas, when I was there, they had prisoners of war there, but they treated them good. They worked in the kitchens. They served the food. But we never abused the German soldiers.

Mr. Potoczek, did you ever consider making a career of the Army?

No. I don't think, I really wasn't cut out to be an Army man, combat, especially, you know. It's not in me.

Yes.

To make-- but if we were at war, I would go.

Yes.

You know what I mean, if they were going to come here to take over our country, then I would go to defend my country, but to make a career out of it. I loved the post office! That's the career I enjoyed. The people, I enjoyed talking to the people, delivering their mail.

Did you join the Reserves, though, when you came out?

Yes. I joined the National Guard.

So how long were you part of that?

I was in there for, I think, a year, and then my boss says, "You know what, we need you here," you know. I was working long hours, and he says, "You're needed more here." So then I talked to the lieutenant. I says, "Can I," this is peace time, I says "I'm working

long hours at the post office, and then to be involved here," so I talked to the lieutenant. And he says, "Well, we'll give you a discharge, this is peacetime, now."

Yes.

But I figured I still wanted to join the National Guard in case they needed me, I'd go back in to defend this country, because I love this country. If anybody attacked this country, I would be the first one to go. So my superintendent, Mr. Roben, from Lakeview, says, "You're working seven days a week here because you're, because we need you." I was working Sundays, too. And he says, "It's too much for you to do this and do that." So, I got a discharge. The lieutenant says, "No problem." He gave me a discharge.

So if you were in the National Guard, would there have been a possibility that you would have been called up during Korea?

If I was in the National Guard, and the Korean War broke out in 1950 or '51--

Yes, '50, yes.

I would have been in Korea. They would have activated me, and I would have went there, but then I was discharged before that.

Yes.

And then working in the post office, federal work, I would be--I'm exempt, because I'm already doing federal work. So they didn't recall me.

Yes.

But, if they would have recalled me, I'd have to go.

Yes.

During the last part of the interview, and we ask all the veterans these couple of questions, Mr. Potoczek, how do you think your military service and your experiences in the Army affected your life?

Well, thank God, I pray every day. I go to church. And the horror stories, there's horrors I dream about it.

Oh.

And it bothers me. It really does. But to get away from the past, I like to be kept busy. I like to be working, doing things to get my mind off of the war. I don't like to think about the war.

Yes.

But, I mean, it's still there.

Yes, but keeping busy helps to keep it at bay, yes.

But keeping busy is the best thing in the world that I can do. I do so many things. I help out. Here, I babysit. Just here's my extended family, my neighbors.

Oh, yes.

She's a school teacher, he's a state trooper. I watch these kids. I'm there every day.

Are you due there at a certain time today?

Well, now, they've got someone there.

Oh, okay.

Yes. So, I always have a--

You're off duty today.

Yes, I have a replacement there that takes over my job, when I'm ever going to do something. I always tell them because I'm there every day. I watch the kids. Because the mother and father both work.

Yes.

So we got the neighbors in between, I take, I keep occupied, I take some of the neighbors to doctors. I try to be busy doing things for others.

Yes.

Keep busy around the house. There's not enough hours in the day, it seems.

To get it all done, yes.

To get it all done.

Yes. Mr Potoczek, your military experience, how do you think it affected your thinking about war or about the military in general?

I hate wars. I wish people could get together and talk instead of going to war.

Yes.

Why can't we sit down and straighten this all out? Why do we, if someone in a country needs something, if they figure they have to have food, why can't we give them the food? -provide for them. Why do we have to have wars? We can help one another. If people over there are starving, send the food there. Like I make commitments to different charity organizations to send that money there to help feed and clothe these children. That's what we should do. We should help one another instead of fighting among one another.

Yes.

I don't know why the Japanese wanted to attack us in Pearl Harbor. What I mean, there was no reason for it. And, now, the Japanese, they build our cars. We're buying their cars, see, it's better that we live with one another, and let them build their cars, and sell their cars, and they're doing good.

Yes.

Why would they have to go to war they struck Pearl Harbor. That wasn't right. We've got to learn to get along with one another.

Yes.

Like I get along with different nationalities real good. I've got friends that are Italian, friends that are Mexican, friends that are colored, black, I get along with them all. Why can't we get along? Why do we have to kill each other? Let's sit down. Hey, this is a big world! Let's help one another.

Yes.

That's the way I look at it.

Those are wonderful, that's, those are wonderful sentiments.

Yes, we had Japanese in our Army as interpreters, too.

Yes.

I got along real well with them, the Japanese. And thank God we have different nationalities. I could, when I was going up to Manchuria to get the prisoners out, we got lost. Wrong Way Corrigan they called me. So, I went into the Russian zone. I stopped-- we were stopped by the Russians. And they were speaking Russian. And I was brought up Polish, I was-- Mother and Father-- I knew the Lord's Prayer in Polish before I knew it in English.

Mmm-hmm.

And I picked up Russian and Polish. We could communicate with the Russians, so they says, "We know where the prisoners are." These are all young soldiers like us. And they says, "But stay here, because it's getting late. Get up early in the morning, and we'll take you to where the prisoners are." They already knew. So, we were sitting there. They were wining and dining. We were drinking vodka. Oh, my! And we all had big heads the next day with the vodka. But these Russians, it didn't bother them.

They could handle it.

They handled it.

Yes.

So then they showed us where all those prisoners were down there. And so then we went down there. And the lieutenant says, "I hope they know the war is over!" We had to be careful. We had to take our weapons with us. And we went in gradually. So I took the jeep, and I went in first, American flag, because if they're going to shoot, let them shoot me! Don't bring the whole outfit in there. But I went in there, and then we had an American-Japanese with me. He could speak their language. And they knew the war was over: they surrendered. So we went in there and we brought all our prisoners of war out, but, thank God, we had Japanese-American soldiers, as interpreters. They were good. As a matter of fact, when I was in the post office, we had Japanese there, too, that were--

There is a Japanese American community in Chicago on the Northside, right? Yes.

So we had good Japanese. But I didn't like the idea we interned their mothers and fathers. But they drafted their sons into the Service.

Did-- So how many of those pilots did you pick up that time in Manchuria, a couple three hundred or?

Oh there were--I'd say a hundred and sixty of them.

A hundred and sixty.

Pilots that were shot down quite a few that were shot down there.

Yes.

And they were skin and bones, skin and bones. And then what happened, they had a trial. I was at the trial, a military trial, and I witnessed it. And I witnessed a hanging. They were all found guilty.

These were Japanese officers?

Just the officers that were in charge of the camp. They executed our soldiers. Maybe if they would have just mistreated them and didn't feed them, maybe they wouldn't have been executed. They hung all the officers. I witnessed it in Shanghai there. They had the rope around their neck, a trap door, and they were executed by hanging.

Yes.

But they should have never killed them. But they killed a lot of the pilots. They were all skin and bones, every one of them. I don't even know if they-- how long they they had TB and everything. They were--

You-- You never came down with malaria, or anything, or--

They gave me, the doctor over there, quinine and atabrine for malaria. They thought I had a touch of malaria, so I was on these pills. I don't know if it was atabrine or quinine

Yes.

that they were giving me that I had to take. Because a lot of the guys did get malaria.

Yes.

From those mosquitoes.

Yes.

But sometimes even-- I would get hot, then cold, then hot, then cold. And the medic there talked to one of the doctors, and then they put me on, I don't remember what it was, quinine or atabrine, one of them, something that I had to take every day. But ill effects, I don't know. Like my doctor, when I went, I've been going to the doctor, they give me pills for potassium, pills, they give me pills for the heart, they give me pills for thyroid.

You look terrific!

Yes. So I'm taking maybe seven pills.

Yes.

And then when I went to the hospital, they gave me pills there, and then they says, "Well, you can get free glasses." I get free glasses, but I will not take money. I says to the National Service Officer for this, I says, "No, I'm able to work. I'm doing good. If you want to give me free glasses, okay." But I still I wear glasses if I drive.

Yes.

I have the glasses in the car, because then, that because of this eye, and then I wear the glasses, but other than that, if I close this eye, I can see beautiful, and then if I close this eye, everything is blurry.

Yes. And that's from the time you got the--

The shrapnel.

The shrapnel, yes.

Well, I'll have that. "That's permanent," he says.

Yes. So, Mr Potoczek, is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered, perhaps? Does anything else come to mind or--

Let me see.

You have a remarkable memory. It's very, very good, all these names, and places, and details.

Sometimes, I have a good-- I had a sharp memory. I remember, because when I worked in the post office, I could remember names.

Yes.

Sorting letters, one to eighty. When you got-- you pick up a letter, and it's in Lakeview, and it's between Lake Shore Drive and--Damen and Diversey north to Montrose. I can pick up that letter. I can tell you exactly where it goes.

Yes.

That's the memory, but I want to use the memory, to memorize things like when we had, oh, I should tell you a story. When I was in Fort Riley, Kansas, on bivouac and it was Sunday, this was a day of rest, bivouac. So, there's six of us. We says, "Let's go to town." I says, "I want to go to church," because I always went to church. So we saddled up the horses. We were on a bivouac on the outskirts there. And, so, I'm looking for the church. I don't know about the other guy. One guy's name, last name, was Lucky. The other guy, there were six of us, and there's Ponterrero, and then there was Pace, and, well, like Ponterrero was looking for a place to drink on Sunday. I says, "I'm looking for a church," I love to go to church. I still love to go to Saint Johns. And we got stopped by MPs with our horses. We were eighteen years old. We thought it's our day off, so we ride to town, and that was Junction City, maybe 15 miles away, and the MPs catch us. He says, "What are you guys doing in town on horses?" We says, "Well, it's Sunday, and I'm looking for a church, and these guys want to go and get a good restaurant." And the two MPs says, "What is your name, soldier?" So, he asks this one his name. He says, "Lucky." That was his last name, Lucky. He says-- the MP says, "Don't get smart with

me, soldier!" "Lucky," he said. That's-- he showed him the dogtag. It says Lucky. But I remember it, because that's an unusual name, Lucky. So he says, "You guys, we're going to write you up. I don't think you're supposed to be here with your horses." And, so, they wrote us up. And we went back to camp, and then we get back to Fort Riley, and guess who my-- one of my commanding officers was, he was a captain, Dan Dailey.

Oh, the movie or the entertainment star!

The entertainer.

Yes.

Dan Dailey is the commanding officer there. And he has us line up in the office there. "What do you guys think you are doing? This is a time of war!" Well, when you're eighteen years old, you don't think, of time of war, you know. He says, "You guys could be court-martialed for doing this!" He says, "But I'm going to tell you what. I'll eliminate the court-martial, but will you accept my true punishment?" We says, "Okay, Captain Dailey, we'll take the true punishment." You know, we don't want a court-martial. So he says, "Okay, you're going to work in the kitchen." And then he says, "You're going to put up hurdles for the horses" when he entertains the general there in Fort Riley, Kansas and all these big shots. So, we say, "Okay," so we accept the true punishment-- we accept it. So here we are. He's got a convertible car, a beautiful car. We all get in, six of us riding in this. We're going to the stables, and all the officers are there, and then they're jumping these hurdles with the horses. Beautiful girls, I guess they're all Hollywood stars. And I says, "My God," I says, "This is true punishment. I can't believe it. This is entertainment!" He took us to a nice restaurant. We ate. Then we had KP in the kitchen. We were eating good over there, too, with the cook. I says, "This ain't, this is nice." Of course, we didn't get our time off or anything. We worked in the kitchen or with the--.

Was that on the same day, the Sunday?

Yes.

The same day?

No.

The following Sunday?

The following Sunday. The report didn't get in

Oh, right.

until later, see.

Yes.

Then he called us into his office. He told Sergeant Porter, "Bring these six guys in." We didn't realize what we were doing wrong. "This is a time of war," he says. Oh!

That's a terrific story.

Yes. Then years later, Jeannie and I, Dan Dailey is playing at the Chicago Theatre. He played "The Odd Couple." He was the one that was messy all the time.

Oscar?

Oscar, he played the part of, he was the original one. And we went down to the Chicago Theatre, my wife and I, and then, after the show, there was a live program on stage. And, so, I went in the back. They had the security guard there. He is an older guy. And I says, "Would you mind telling Mr. Dailey that I'd like to see him? Tell him this is from the 124th Horse Cavalry, and the six guys that went on a bivouac, and took the horses into Junction City. And he told him. And Dailey came running out. He grabbed me. He says, "Jeez, I was worried about you guys!" You know, he never went overseas. He just took us to the train and saw us off. And he says, "I often thought about you guys," You know, when we're overseas. And I says, "Yes, and I thought it would be nice to see you." He says, "I'm so glad that you've come to see me." He took us out to lunch. He says, "Tell me everything about Troop I." You know, that's the troop I belong to, the 124th Cavalry Troop I. And I told him the things that went on over there. He says, "Thank you," because when I went to Fort Riley, Kansas, he wasn't there. "I saw," I says, "I saw Sergeant Porter." And I guess they either transferred him somewhere else, but he wasn't there anymore. But he was so happy to see us. We sat there, and ate, and drank. And I says, "Good thing we got there by train! - by the 'L', we took the 'L' down there.

Didn't come on horses!

No He was so happy. But this man, Dan Dailey, he had a memory! The Articles of War, he had to read them to us all from memory. What a memory he had! It was unbelievable. But Jeannie was so happy to see him. She said, "Oh, you met Dan Dailey!"

Well, Mr. Potoczek, you have a wonderful memory, and it's wonderful that you were able to come in today and provide us with this memoir of service and give the younger generation a chance at reading the transcript that we'll develop and maybe appreciating a little bit more what you and your other members of the 124th Cavalry contributed to the war effort in CBI theatre. And, as I say, we don't have-- we've only got one other account from the CBI, so this really helps us to sort of provide a picture.

Yes. So we fought all over the world, from the United States, yes. But this is a great country. I love this country. I got, still, I lost a lot of friends, I got, but thank God for Roland Perski. He's in Honolulu. He's still alive with a nice family and everything. We keep in contact. I got friends, well, in New York that was Keyhart, Paul Keyhart. Thank God, he's still alive. We keep in contact. And they are all over the United States, and

even from my old school, Chase School, from five years old, when we were in kindergarten. We still keep in contact with each other. We're all the same age, 84 years old.

Yes.

And we still call each other or write a letter. I like to call. California, Florida, well, they're scattered all over.

Yes.

Wisconsin. So, I try to keep in contact with everybody, and then when it comes to Christmas, I send out a hundred and sixty Christmas cards to all my friends, relatives. So I keep in contact.

And that's business for the post office!

Yes. Yes. So I just like, I love people. I love mingling with people, regardless, young, old, I like to keep in contact.

Yes.

Because I says, "I got more friends than money!" And that's what counts, your friends.

Yes.

And now I'm retired. Oh, I get a nice pension for they gave me credit for the Army, they gave me, then I had 43 years in the post office. All my life was under the federal government. And I get a good health insurance. I can go to the VA hospital. All my wife's surgery she had, I keep a record. It was 700,000 dollars, almost a million dollars, in medical bills for her. And it was all paid by the insurance, federal government. Well, I pay, let's see now, I pay a hundred for the federal pension. Federal insurance is a hundred and forty dollars. Medicare, I got my wife's Medicare, because I didn't work under, I didn't have the quarters for social security, so when she passed away, they says I get her Medicare card.

Survivor, yes.

Survivors, so I'm under her social security, so when I submit a bill to the doctors, first Medicare picks it up, then the government insurance pays the balance.

Yes.

So, I had a little problem with my feet. I went to the foot doctor. They paid a hundred percent. I had arteries over here on the left side and the right side. I went to the hospital.

My doctor says I need surgery, so they gave me a specialist. They says if I don't have this taken care of and it goes to the brain, I could have a stroke.

Yes.

You know, you lose your memory. So I went there, and that bill was around 43, 000. And then Medicare and the other insurance picked it up. I didn't pay one penny. I says I was very lucky, fortunate, that I've got this insurance. Otherwise, there goes the house. You know, they put a lien against your house, if you don't pay the bills. Because I've seen so many of my friends, they didn't have insurance, and they lose, they put a lien against the house.

Yes.

What's, I don't know, I feel sorry. You work all your life and then to have it all taken away from you. So I feel sorry. Like a lot of times, I think maybe it would be a good idea to have universal healthcare. Because it's a hardship. I was fortunate, in a way

Yes.

that I got into the post office. And then they provide for you. They have good insurance. But what about these other people? They work, some of them, twenty-five years for a company, and then they go bankrupt.

Oh, hi. There's a lady here to see you, is there?

Oh.

Is this your daughter?

That's my niece.

Your niece.

Yes. Come in, Josephine.

Josephine: I've got you!

Mr. Potoczek's niece has just arrived. Your name is?

Josephine. She's the one that made up all these pictures.

Yes.

That's my sister's niece.

Hi, Josephine. My name is Neil.

Josephine: Hi. Nice to meet you.

I'm just wondering if it's possible whether we could maybe get the originals of some of these?

Josephine: He's got the originals.

We could make a date, and I can bring the originals in.

*Yes, because I'd like to scan, we can, we'll scan those.
And then when we type up the interview, then we give Mr. Potoczek a booklet and at the back of it, it's nice to have pictures that explain the story.*

Yes.

And I'd scan something, but I think the pictures, some of them would really help.

Yes. I'll bring them in anytime you want.

You'll have to give me a little time. I'm going to call you. You aren't going on vacation anytime soon or anything?

No. Call me and I'll have the original pictures.

Good.

Josephine: See because I scanned them on my on my computer.

Yes.

Josephine: And then I just put it on there, and then I says, "Well, you know what, I've got them." I says, "Print them out and everything!" So we'll bring it.

Yes.

You just call.

I will. Thank you very much for a wonderful interview.

Yes. Thank you.

Yes.

Reader's Note:

The following 19 pages illustrate the interview with scans and copies of pertinent photographs, documents, articles and maps. Also included is a copy of the "History of the 124th Cavalry," written by Major Sadler and a copy of the wording on the historical marker in Brownsville, Texas, commemorating the regiment's service and distinction as the "last mounted cavalry in the Army."

Mr. Potoczek standing below while stationed in Ft. Riley, Kansas while completing basic training. His three buddies from left to right are Clayton, Ponterro and Dick Miller who is still a life-long friend.



Mr. Potoczek and Dick Miller in Manchuria where they helped to bring back the American POWs who had been mistreated by the Japanese. to Shanghai where their abusers faced military trials.

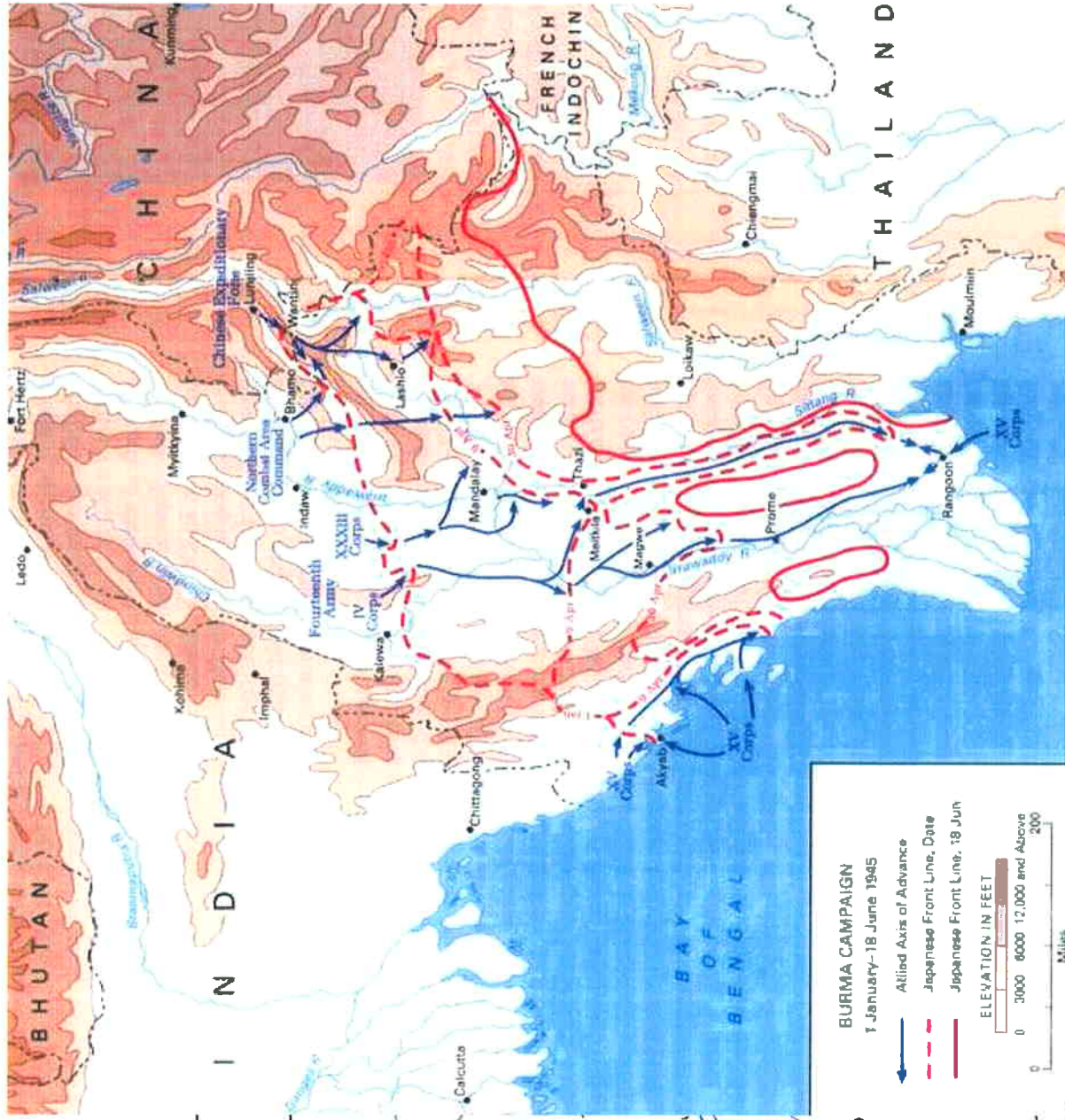
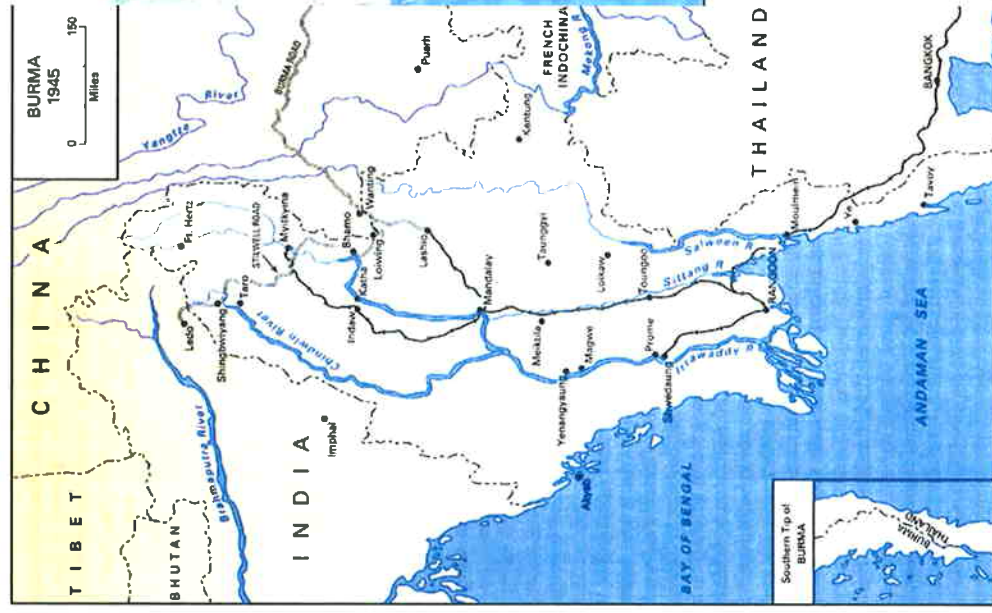


Mr. Potoczek is mounted under the "X" in this scan of a photograph of the entire 124th Cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas. The 124th was the last mounted cavalry in the Army. The picture was taken in July, 1944.



Scan of framed photo of Mr. Potoczek after completing his basic training at Ft. Riley, Kansas.

In May of 1942 the Japanese captured Burma and closed down and destroyed the Burma Road, the only overland route by which the Chinese could be resupplied. The Allies and General Stilwell sought to reopen it, and Mr. Potoczek served in that effort.



Maps taken from <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-Burma45/index.html> site



Medics caring for wounded in Burma



Major Blair in Burma

Pictures of **Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek** and his wife with **General Joseph Stilwell**, known as "Vinegar Joe." **Mr. Potoczek** walked with General Stilwell in Burma. The General advised his men not to take their boots off because "you'll never get them back on."

Mr. Potoczek was later given a medal by Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai.



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Chiang_Kai_Shek_and_wife_with_Lieutenant_General_Stilwell.jpg/



www.teachersparadise.com/.../soong_may_ling.html

General Wedemeyer replaced General Stilwell in October of 1944 as Commander of U.S forces in China. **Mr. Potoczek** served as his chauffeur in Shanghai. The General had observed him working in an Army hospital looking after his fellow soldiers and selected him. Red Cross nursing personnel, who had just arrived, took over his duties in the hospital. General Wedemeyer appeared on the cover of Time Magazine on June 4, 1945.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Coady_Wedemeyer



<http://www.flyingtigers69thdrs.org/photoalley/shanghai19451046.html>

The racetrack in Shanghai where US troops collected weapons from Japanese prisoners who were being processed for transport back to Japan.

Mr. Potoczek's Honorable Discharge

BOOK 362 PAGE 26 HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL POTOCZEK		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 6		3. GRADE SGT	4. ARM OR SERVICE CAV	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION 124TH CAVALRY 1 TROOP		7. DATE OF SEPARATION MAY 46		8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEP CENTER CP MCCOY WIS		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES W CORTLAND ST CHICAGO ILL				10. DATE OF BIRTH 20 SEP 25	11. PLACE OF BIRTH CHICAGO ILL	
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEP 9				13. COLOR EYES BLUE	14. COLOR HAIR BROWN	15. HEIGHT 5-7
16. RACE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE	<input type="checkbox"/> NEGRO	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)	19. MARITAL STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SINGLE	<input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)	20. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES
				21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. STUDENT HIGH SCHOOL X-02		

MILITARY HISTORY

22. DATE OF INDUCTION APR 44	23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 10 APR 44	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE 10 APR 44	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE FT SHERIDAN ILL
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGISTERED	26. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. 47	28. COUNTY AND STATE COOK ILL	29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE SEE 9
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. UTILITY REPAIRMAN 121		31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (I.e., Infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) COMBAT INFANTRYMAN BADGE RIFLE MM	
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS CENTRAL BURMA INDIA BURMA CHINA OFFENSIVE			

33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS
ASIATIC-PACIFIC THEATER SERVICE MEDAL GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL

34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION
NONE

35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES				36. SERVICE OVERSEAS CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN			
SMALLPOX APR 46	TYPHOID APR 46	TETANUS MAY 44	OTHER (specify) TYP APR 46	DATE OF DEPARTURE 26 SEP 44	DEPARTURE U S A	DATE OF ARRIVAL 29 OCT 44	ARRIVAL 7 MAY 46
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE				38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD			
CONTINENTAL SERVICE		FOREIGN SERVICE		SGT			
YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS	YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS		
0	5	23	1	7	12		
39. PRIOR SERVICE NONE							
40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONVENIENCE OF THE GOVT BR1-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615-365 15 DEC 44							
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED NONE							
42. EDUCATION (Years)							
Grades		High School		College			
8		4		0			

PAY DATA

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES	44. MUSTERING OUT PAY	45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS	46. TRAVEL PAY	47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER
YEARS: 2 MONTHS: 7 DAYS: 5	TOTAL: \$ 300 THIS PAYMENT: \$ 100	NONE	\$12.25	147.56 H L OLDENBURG MAJ FD

INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.							
48. KIND OF INSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nat. Serv. <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None	49. HOW PAID <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allotment <input type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A.	50. Effective Date of Termination Discontinuance MAY 46	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 30 JUN 46	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.50	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue		

RIGHT THUMB PRINT	54. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 44 THREE (3) OVERSEAS BARS
-------------------	--

56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>[Signature]</i>	57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) ROBERT L STEWART WOJG USA <i>[Signature]</i>
---	---



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

MATTHEW POTOCZEK

SERGEANT

124TH CAVALRY 1 TROOP

Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military
service of the United States of America.*

*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest
and Faithful Service to this country.*

Given at

SEPARATION CENTER
CAMP MCCOY WISCONSIN

Date

MAY 1946

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas H. Hammond".

THOMAS H. HAMMOND
MAJOR AGD



MATTHEW POTOCZEK

To you who answered the call of your country and served in its Armed Forces to bring about the total defeat of the enemy, I extend the heartfelt thanks of a grateful Nation. As one of the Nation's finest, you undertook the most severe task one can be called upon to perform. Because you demonstrated the fortitude, resourcefulness and calm judgment necessary to carry out that task, we now look to you for leadership and example in further exalting our country in peace.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Harry Truman".



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING: THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962 HAS AWARDED

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO Sergeant Matthew Potoczek, United States Army

FOR Exemplary conduct in ground combat against the armed enemy during World War II in the Asiatic Pacific Theater of Operations.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 30th DAY OF June 1982

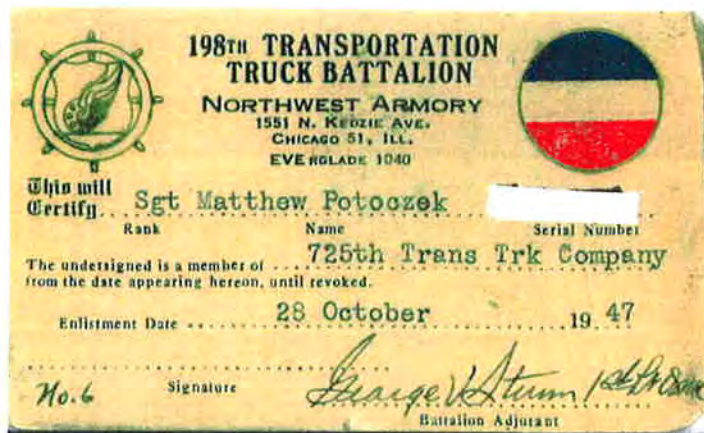

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL




SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

**Mr. Potoczek's Bronze Medal, awarded for
"exemplary conduct in ground combat..."**





Mr. Potoczek joined the Reserves after he returned to Chicago for a period until his Post Office workload forced him to leave.

AMERICAN LEGION

Certificate of Nomination



THIS CERTIFIES THAT

Matthew Potoczek

UPON MEETING THE STRICT REQUIREMENTS
SET FORTH BY THE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
SHALL THEREBY BE ACCEPTED FOR OFFICIAL MEMBERSHIP
IN THE AMERICAN LEGION

IN GRATITUDE FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN PROTECTING AMERICA'S
FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY, YOUR NAME, UPON ACTIVATION OF YOUR
MEMBERSHIP, WILL BE INSCRIBED ON THE AMERICAN LEGION
SPECIAL MEMBER ROLLS.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rob W. Edwards".

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S SIGNATURE OF NOMINATION



Community Focus

Veteran recalls Burma Road trek with World War II cavalry

Packing mules along hazardous mountain passes no wider than a city sidewalk...nearly impenetrable jungle growth and elephant grass eight feet tall...days of scorching hot treks and frosty nights huddled under a single Army-issue wool blanket...and learning to take care of your best friend, your horse, before your own need. These thoughts and others all are etched in the memory of Northwest Side resident Joe Leipzig, a member of the last U.S. Cavalry troops.

A member of the 124th cavalry assigned to the China-Burma-India (C-B-I) war theater during the height of fighting in World War II, Leipzig and other cavalry members went on to make their mark in history both as decorated heroes and as the final mounted fighting unit.

"After basic training of horse cavalry and mule packing in the summer of 1944, I joined the 124th in India to walk across the country of Burma from the border of India to the old Burma Road, creating a road block so the Japanese could not go back up the road or send supplies and troops

Force... a long penetration task force unit including the 124th and 475 Infantry, 612th and 613th Pack Artillery, 49th Portable Surgical Hospital and three pack troops."

After dipping their fatigues in typhus dip and donning canvas leggings to protect against the dreaded typhus mite and prevalent leeches, the men of the 124th began their journey across the Burmese countryside, penetrating behind Japanese lines and damaging enemy supplies, roads and troops.

Leipzig, who served as a medic with the cavalry unit, loaded up his mule, Red, for a fateful and historic journey through rice paddies, over hills and mountains, across bridgeless rivers and down narrow mountain trails where even the slightest brush against a canyon wall could mean the loss of both mule and supplies over the edge. Night time bivouacs meant first aid action for Leipzig and other medics treating troopers with blisters and foot problems resulting from the rigorous journey.

In 31 days the unit trekked

thought the journey impossible.

Leipzig's military career began June 19, 1944, when he was inducted into the Army at Ft. Sheridan. After being sworn in, completing physical exams and issued his uniform, Leipzig and other Chicagoans were sent to Ft. Riley, Kansas.

"Upon arrival, the Army did a strange thing," Leipzig recalled. "They asked us if we wanted to ride horses or take tank and armored training. I chose the horses since I had always liked the cavalry, and being from the city I had only seen horses at riding stables and pulling milk wagons. Funny thing is, even being in the cavalry, I still had to do a lot of walking to get in shape for what we would have to accomplish in Burma."

The cavalry recruits learned to take care of their horses before seeing to their own needs. They learned to ride bareback by jumping onto the horse's back and swinging one leg to the other side...something Leipzig says is not as easy as it may sound. Basic rifle training and instruction in other firearms were included. In October, the group was sent

the cavalry journeyed to Los Angeles and boarded the troop attack transport U.S.S. General Randall for a 35-day Pacific crossing. Leipzig received his "Trusty Shellback" initiation aboard the Randall after crossing the equator three times during the zig-zag journey. The ship made port in Bombay, India, during the second week of January, 1945, where troops were switched to trains for a ride across the Indian sub-continent to Ledo and a trek into the jungle.

It was here that the now-famous Mars Task Force began their 280-mile walk across the country of Burma. Combat came and lasted several weeks, according to Leipzig.

"After all my cavalry training and combat, I was assigned to the medical detachment," Leipzig recalled. "At least I knew how to pack a mule and get it going! That was no small matter."

After a brief rest period, the



Northwest Side resident Joe Leipzig, currently working security at Resurrection Medical Center, poses in his cavalry uniform during his World War II military stint. A member of the last active cavalry regiment, Leipzig saw action in the China-Burma-India war theater and today remains an active "Basha-Booster" at reunion and ceremonial events.

group hiked down the famed Burma Road which was now open. They followed the Chinese units into Lashio and there awaited air transport to Yunnan, China, where the nights were bitter cold and required four doubled-over blankets to keep warm.

"There we had cots, a welcome change after sleeping on the ground for so long in either tents or on a bamboo floor in a basha," he stated. "I was then sent to Kweiyang which was a large truck-rail stop and traveled up

and down the Road four or five times as a medic for the Army."

The original Burma Road was built by the Chinese beginning in 1938 from Kunming, China, to Rangoon, Burma, according to Leipzig. The American-built road ran from Ledo, India, across Burma to the Chinese-Burma border and was 1,100 miles long. It took about two or three weeks to make the trip in convoys bringing gas, ammunition, and other supplies to troops battling in Chi-

Continued on Page 34

Bugle article about another soldier who also served with the 124th Cavalry in the China-Burma-India Theater from 1944 to 1945. The print along the folded crease could not be scanned. The article continues on the next page.

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Veteran...

Continued from Page 2

na, the cavalryman recalled. The last GI convoy reached Kunming Oct. 8, 1945. After eight months and 27 days, the Ledo-Burma road saw no more U.S. convoys.

Thrice decorated during his career, Leipzig received medals for being in combat in Northern Burma, being close to the front in Southern Burma, and for being at the front in China where he helped engineers rebuild and repair bridges. He later received the Combat Medic Badge, the Bronze Star, and the Chinese War Memorial Medal.

Leipzig's mule, Red, remained in Burma with more than 1,000 pack mules and was corralled at Myitkyina. In early 1945, Red and the other mules were sold to the Nationalist Chinese government. Three companies of men were assembled to drive the mules over the American Burma Road back to Kunming. The caravan had been underway for about three months when the first atomic bomb fell Aug. 6 on Hiroshima. The Japanese surrendered Aug. 15.

Shortly after the surrender the GI drovers received new orders, according to Leipzig. The march officially ended about 100 miles short of Kunming and the mules, including Red, were ordered destroyed.

According to the former cavalryman, the "saga of the 1,001 mules and the GI drovers" is one of the many untold stories of the C-B-I war theater where "the unusual was the usual and the unbelievable was acted out time and again in front of our very eyes."

Leipzig, who recently reunited with fellow cavalrymen at a 13th reunion, says he is especially proud of his cavalry stint and his unit's distinction. The horse cav-

under a commander who came to the New World to aid colonists in their battle for independence. That commander was Polish Count Casimir Pulaski.

In 1942 the cavalry was disbanded, except for the 124th cavalry, a former Texas National Guard unit stationed at Ft. Brown in Brownsville, Texas. Primary responsibilities there include Mexican border patrol and South Padre Island. The 124th had become part of the U.S. Army in 1939, and during World War II Leipzig and others with extensive horse and mule-packing training were summoned to the China-Burma-India theater for military action.

Still an avid "Basha Booster," Leipzig and his cavalry colleague participate in a variety of special ceremonial functions and parade throughout the country. Leipzig is especially proud of his snappy cavalry uniform and brilliantly polished boots, all fitting as they did nearly 45 years ago.

He and his wife Bernice, who recently celebrated a 48th wedding anniversary, are the parents of two daughters, Gale and Lee and the grandparents of four.

HISTORY OF THE 124TH CAVALRY GIVEN BY MAJOR BYRON P.
SADLER (RET) ON OCTOBER 27, 1990 AT THE DEDICATION
CEREMONY ON THE TEXAS SOUTHMOST COLLEGE GROUNDS, FORT
BROWN, BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 124TH
CAVALRY ASSOCIATION'S TWENTY FOURTH ANNUAL REUNION.

HISTORY OF THE 124TH CAVALRY

Byron Sadler, Major (RET)

DEDICATION CEREMONY

OCTOBER 27, 1990

HISTORY OF THE 124TH CAVALRY

The 124th Cavalry was constituted February 13, 1929. In the National Guard of the State of Texas and was assigned to the 56th Cavalry Brigade.

The Lineage of the 124th Cavalry begins with the transfer of the 15th U.S. Army Cavalry Division from the Mexican Border to duty in France in 1918, at which time the War Department requested Texas to organize two Brigades of Cavalry for the primary purpose of protecting the Mexican Border. The First Cavalry Brigade was organized and commanded by Brigadier General Jacob F. Wolters (the Father of Texas Cavalry). Shortly after the Armistice, these units were ordered home and placed on State Status.

On August 23, 1919, the First Cavalry Brigade was reorganized and redesignated as the 56th Cavalry Brigade composed of the 112th Cavalry Regiment and the 56th Machine Gun Squadron stationed in Texas, plus the 111th Cavalry Regiment from New Mexico. In early 1929 the War Department authorized the reorganization of the 56th Cavalry Brigade and released the 111th Cavalry Regiment to New Mexico. In this reorganization, the 124th Cavalry Regiment was formed from the Machine Gun Squadron, plus units of one of the Squadrons of the 112th Cavalry Regiment. This action gave Texas a full Brigade of Cavalry.

During the 1930's, weekly training drills were usually conducted on Sunday mornings at the Troop's home station. Mounted drills varied, with dismounted drill or rifle practice and schools in various Military subjects. For 15 days each summer the Regiment trained at Camp Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas. Training included maneuvers in various sections of Palo Pinto and surrounding counties. In the summer of 1939, the Regiment participated in the Third Army Maneuvers in the vicinity of Camp Bullis near San Antonio, Texas,

and included the Oklahoma National Guard and Regular Army Troops from the Eighth Corps. Those who participated will vividly remember the heat, dust, and wood ticks which infected both men and horses. In 1940, as the war situation in Europe became progressively worse, additional training was ordered for the National Guard. The training period covered 21 days in the Lake Valentine Area of Louisiana with units of the Third Army.

Units and individuals of the Regiment were on duty under Martial Law at Borger, Texas, when in 1929 it became necessary to supplant the civil authority in that oil town; at Sherman, Texas in 1930 due to a race riot; and in the East Texas Oil Field when the entire Brigade was moved to enforce the Railroad Commission's Oil Production Regulations in 1931, some members of the Regiment remained on this last assignment for over six months. Production and production control measures on oil and gas were enacted by the Texas Legislature as a result of the East Texas Martial Law control.

In October 1940 the 56th Cavalry Brigade had the only purely "Horse Regiments" left in the National Guard. All other National Guard Cavalry Divisions and Brigades were inactivated and their regiments converted to Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, and Horse and Mechanized Regiments. Of the nine National Guard Brigades from which to choose, the 56th survived and entered active Federal Service. This decision was based on the caliber and training of the Brigade men and officers.

On November 16, 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 8594, ordering certain units of the National Guard of the United States into active service of the United States. The order was effective November 18, 1940, and included the 56th Cavalry Brigade. Members were inducted for a one year period only.

Officers and men of the troop were given 10 days to sever civilian ties before moving by train to Fort Bliss, Texas, near El Paso, our first training

station as members of the Army of the United States. Fort Bliss was expanding rapidly at this time, and we were quartered in a newly developed area still under construction. Many of us here today will remember the cold, uncomfortable days with little shelter or heat, but with lots of blowing sand. Just as our temporary buildings were being completed, the unit was alerted to move. Early in February 1941, the Brigade received orders to change stations with the First Cavalry Division stationed at the lower border posts. The 56th Cavalry Brigade Headquarters and Brigade troops moved to Fort McIntosh at Laredo, Texas. The 112th Regiment relieved the 5th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Clark, Texas. The 124th relieved the 12th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Brown in Brownsville and Fort Ringgold at Rio Grande City, Texas. The troops were becoming acquainted with barracks life in the beautiful old border posts when the Brigade was ordered back to Fort Bliss for desert maneuvers in June 1940, with the First Cavalry Division in the boondocks of Texas and New Mexico. The largest review of Horse Soldiers since the Civil War took place while we were at Fort Bliss, made up on the First Cavalry Division and the 56th Cavalry Brigade -- some 13,000 mounted men. Major/^{General}Innis P. Swift stated, "Of all the regiments participating, the 124th was the most outstanding, both in appearance and performance." Just seven months earlier we had been week-end civilian soldiers.

Soon after induction into Federal Service, the Regiment started sending officers and enlisted men to training schools, most of which were at Fort Riley, Kansas, home of the Cavalry School. Officers attended Basic Horse and Mechanized School, while the enlisted men attended NCO School, Horse Shoer School, Saddler School, Cook and Baker School, and Officer Candidate School. There was a constant turnover of officers and enlisted men, along with those going to schools. Some were transferring to other branches of the service,

especially the Air Force. In Summer of 1941, the Regiment began receiving the first selectees, most of whom were Yankees where until now we were 100% Texans. It was not long before the Yankees were as proud of the Lone Star Flag as we Texans were.

Leaving Fort Bliss, the Regiment participated in the Louisiana maneuvers lasting from August 12 to October 2, 1941. Elements of two armies were involved in this exercise, which was the largest maneuver in American History. Upon conclusion of the maneuvers the Regiment returned to the Border Posts. Duty at Fort Brown in 1941 can best be summed up in the statement made by a young trooper on guard duty. He said, "Captain, while walking my post last night, I felt like I was in Heaven. As I walked my Post, the moon shone through the waving palms, a mocking bird sang a beautiful song, and the odor of orange blossoms filled the air." And, I knew what he was talking about.

The next great event in the life of the 124th happened on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, when over the radio came this announcement, "Pearl Harbor has been attacked by the Japanese." At 12:30 PM December 8, 1941, President Roosevelt addressed the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives meeting in joint session and stated, "Yesterday, December 8, 1941 - A date which will live in infamy." The Regiment continued its training program, along with patrolling the Rio Grande Border, for we were never sure of Mexico's stand, although their officers were very friendly.

In July 1942, our sister Regiment, the 112th Cavalry, was alerted and left Fort Clark for New Caledonia where they trained with Australian horses for nine months before becoming Doughboys and going into action in the islands of the South Pacific. During 1943 both the First and Second Cavalry Divisions were ordered to turn in their horses and all horse equipment. Thus, the 124th Cavalry Regiment became the last Horse Cavalry Regiment to serve in the United States Army.

On May 10, 1944, the 124th Regiment moved by train from the border posts to Fort Riley, Kansas, taking all horses and horse equipment. At Fort Riley, the Regiment received an A-2 Priority Rating for procurement of controlled items of equipment. Personnel adjustments were made, and we received new men and officers in order to be "combat ready." On July 7, 1944, the Regiment departed Fort Riley via rail for Camp Anzio, California, a port of embarkation near Los Angeles, California. Prior to departure, the Regiment turned in its horses to the Quartermaster at Fort Riley, but loaded all saddles and other mounted equipment for shipment overseas.

On July 25, 1944, the Regiment boarded the U. S. Ship General H. W. Butner, a troop transport, bound for India via Melbourne, Australia. The voyage ended in Bombay, India on August 26, 1944. From Bombay, the unit moved by wide gauge rail across the country to the Ramgarh Training Center in the Province of Bihar, India, some 150 miles West of Calcutta. Here the Regiment learned that it would be dismounted, but would retain its Cavalry designation. Orders were received to reorganize into a long-range penetration unit; and we were renamed the "124th Cavalry-Special." Mounted equipment was stored and dismounted type items of clothing were issued.

The Regiment departed Ramgarh, India for Burma on October 20, 1944. Transportation was on primitive railroad and river steamer up the Brahmaputra River to Gauhatti, India, then by narrow gauge rail through the Assam Valley to Ledo; from Ledo to Myitkyina, Burma by C-47 aircraft, then to Camp Landis by truck. The Regiment arrived in Burma on October 31, 1944. It was here that the Mars Task Force was formed. This organization contained the 124th Cavalry, the 475th Infantry, a Chinese Combat Team, two Battalions of Field Artiller, some Quartermaster mule pack troops, and medical and other miscellaneous units needed in a combat force of such magnitude.

The Mars Task Force was given the mission of clearing Northern Burma of Japanese forces and opening the Burma Road for truck traffic to China. In order to accomplish this mission, the force moved more than 200 miles by foot over the most hazardous terrain in Burma, over mountainous jungles, steep trails, swift streams and rivers on hot days and cold nights, in rain and mud, coupled with the ever fear of mite typhus. This was all done while being cut off completely from friendly forces and having to depend entirely upon air supply. The 124th established contact with the enemy on January 19, 1945, and fought continuously for 17 days. With the objective secure, an administrative bivouac was declared around February 15, 1945.

The only Medal of Honor given in the C.B.I. Theater was presented posthumously to Lt. Jack Knight for heroic action in battle. Lt. Knight was commanding "F" Troop of the 124th Cavalry at the time of his death. The hill on which he was killed was named Knight Hill by order of Admiral Louis Mountbatten. The Regiment departed the combat zone for Lashio on February 28, 1945; and after a short stay in Lashio was flown over "The Hump" to Kunming, China, completing the move on May 14. On June 11, orders were issued for inactivation of the Regiment, and on July 1, 1945, the 124th Cavalry Regiment (Special) ceased to exist.

Thus ended more than 16 years of honor to duty, unparalleled stamina, courage and Esprit De Corps unequalled in Cavalry History.

History of the 124th Cavalry 1929-1945

THE 124th CAVALRY REGIMENT WAS ORGANIZED IN MARCH 1929, AS PART OF THE TEXAS MOUNTED CAVALRY, UNDER COMMAND OF TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD AND EXISTING 56th CAVALRY BRIGADE. THE MOTTO OF THE 124th IS "GOLPEO RAPIDAMENTE", SPANISH FOR I STRIKE QUICKLY.

UNDER THE NATIONAL DEFENSE ACT, ALL MEMBERS OF THE 56th CAVALRY BRIGADE WERE INDUCTED INTO ACTIVE MILITARY TRAINING WITH THE UNITED STATES ARMY, EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 18, 1940. AFTER MEETING REGULAR ARMY TRAINING STANDARDS AT FORT BLISS, TEXAS, THE NATIONAL GUARD CAVALRYMEN EXCHANGED MILITARY POST WITH THE REGULAR ARMY CAVALRY STATIONED ALONG THE RIO GRANDE RIVER. ON FEBRUARY 2, 1941, THE 124th OCCUPIED FORT BROWN AT BROWNSVILLE, WITH THE 2nd SQUADRON BEING SENT TO FORT RINGGOLD AT RIO GRANDE CITY. THE DESIGNATED PERIOD OF ACTIVE FEDERAL DUTY WAS EXTENDED INDEFINITELY FOLLOWING THE JAPANESE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR, WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENTERED WORLD WAR II.

IN MAY, 1944, THE 124th VACATED FORTS BROWN AND RINGGOLD AND WERE SENT TO THE CHINA-BURMA-INDIA THEATER OF WAR. DISMOUNTED, THEY TEAMED WITH OTHER COMBAT UNITS TO FORM THE MARS TASK FORCE AND BATTLED THE JAPANESE IN CENTRAL BURMA. USING PACK MULES AND RELYING PRIMARILY ON AIRDROP SUPPLIES, THEY TRAVELED 279 MILES IN 31 DAYS ON FOOT OVER EXTREMELY DIFFICULT JUNGLE AND MOUNTAIN TERRAIN. WEEKS OF HEAVY FIGHTING RESULTED IN BREAKING THE ENEMY'S RESISTANCE AND ULTIMATELY PERMITTED COMPLETION OF THE STILWELL ROAD FROM INDIA TO A JUNCTION OF THE BURMA ROAD, WHICH BECAME A LIFE SUPPLY LINE INTO CHINA. THE 124th WAS COMMEDED FOR ITS OUTSTANDING BATTLE ACHIEVEMENT, CLAIMING 10 ENEMY FOR EACH CAVALRYMAN. THE 124th CAVALRY (SPECIAL) WAS INACTIVATED JULY 1, 1945, IN KUNMING, CHINA.

THE 124th CAVALRY REGIMENT WAS THE LAST MOUNTED CAVALRY IN THE ARMY, AND THE LAST CAVALRY REGIMENT STATIONED AT FORT BROWN, TEXAS.

The above is wording on Historical Marker dedicated and presented to Texas Southmost College, Brownsville, Texas, October 27, 1990.