



Walter Tymczuk

U.S. Army

World War II

Veterans History Project Interview

14 April 2005

Walter Tymczuk Interview
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Also speaking: Celine Tymczuk
Interviewer: Kate Wolicki

CT: Say my name is Walter Tymczuk...

002: INTRODUCTION

KW: Okay, I'm going to start. I'm going to say: This interview is being conducted on April 14, 2005 at 6817 Cleveland Avenue in Niles, Illinois. My name is Kate Wolicki. I am speaking with Mr. Walter Tymczuk. Mr. Tymczuk was born in Chicago and now lives in Niles, IL. Mr Tymczuk learned of the Veterans History Project...oh, I forgot to ask you where you learned it through...

CT: Through Jan Schakowsky, Representative Schakowsky, and also at the Memorial dedication of the World War II Memorial on May 29th [2004] and through the Niles Library.

KW: Oh, that's right, I'd forgotten it was all those places. So he's kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story. His wife may also be commenting. Her name is [Marie] Celine Tymczuk. Alright, we're going to start at the beginning when you entered the military, so we kind of lead up. So..

012: TRAINING

WT: I was at...December 2, 1942, we assembled at downtown [Chicago], the Armory, I believe, and we were examined, and then we were shipped to Camp Grant. And we had to, there we had got to change clothes, ship our clothes back home, and we had to take an IQ test. And then we were assigned to our units, which was Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. And had basic training there, and then we had maneuvers there too, in the swamps of Louisiana. And then after the maneuvers, we were shipped to Texas. Camp [Fort] Howze. And then from there I got shipped across the sea.

CT: To the East coast.

023: TO NORMANDY

WT: To the East coast, then we got boarded there on December[?] 6, and we sailed at the 7th, we got about the 15th or 16th to England, and then on train we went out to the Southern part of England, out in the open field with pitched tents for two, three days, and then on the 19th we loaded onto ship, and we landed on the 20th [July, 1944] on the beach. And it was a severe thunderstorm, awful rough waters and we'd walk two steps up and slide three down,

CT: Up the cliff

WT: Off the cliff, and while we were all so exhausted, it got bad, as could get trucks to us, took us to the other part of France. And then we waited there three days, for Patton to get or... to bring his tanks to get organized, and then we pushed off, we attacked, on the third day I think it was...we had another severe thunderstorm, but we had to stay on a muddy road. You couldn't

walk off there because the area was mined heavily. And for some reason at the time we started going across, the Germans started shelling us, so heavily so every time a shell come you hit the dirt, the road, dirt, and like puddles of water and mud. It took us about a couple of hours to get through that, and then finally we pushed them Germans back, and then we waited. Next day we pushed off again, and got the Germans on the run, and then Patton came in with his tanks. And we marched and mopped up after him. Then it was some time between there and...what town was it I said, Paris?

CT: Yes.

046: (NOT) TAKING PARIS AND BEING SHELLED

WT: I can't think of the name of it. Anyway, we went down the coast, and we swung around to Paris, and we sat outside of Paris because the French wanted to take their own town, because they were afraid we would destroy it. Then when they secured it we turned around and started going toward Belgium and Luxembourg. And we were going along alright when all of a sudden the Germans got set up and they started shelling us. And when you're up there that long and hear the shells you can tell almost how close or how far away they're gonna hit, if they sound like they're going far you don't hit the ground or anything, you just keep going. But if it's close you hit the ground. Well, this time was pretty close, and the shells were coming in. There was a shell come in, it hit a reconnaissance plane that blew up in the sky. And then next thing I knew one was coming in closer to me, so I hit the ground, and it hit the top of the tree. It exploded and the shrapnel hit me in the back. Knocked the wind out of me, and how long I was unconscious out of the wind I don't know. And...

CT: Tell about the backpack. The backpack was shot off.

WT: That was early, that was...

CT: Well, you missed that.

058: THREE CLOSE CALLS

WT: Well, anyway. Like I said, I had three close calls. The pack was shot off of me, and I had the shrapnel hit me in the back, injury,

CT: It shot through your...

WT: And the shot, the bullets made a pattern around my face [referred to later, around 631]. And we reached Belgium (not into Belgium, but to Belgium,) Patton ran out of ammo and gas, so the supply couldn't keep up with him so they pulled us out and went to help the Americans in Italy. And we fought with them up to the Rhine River, and then the Battle of the Bulge broke out, and they pulled us out to go help at the Battle of the Bulge, where I got cut out of, out of, mentally ill, and I came home. They sent me to the first aid station, and from there they sent me to France, and they examined me, and they said, "Well, don't worry about it. Go to your room, we'll get your records, we'll let you know in three to four days," they said "Don't worry about it, you're on your way home, soon as you get a ship."

CT: Six months on the front lines. And another time you had a shell that shot your ammo belt and your pants belt. That's the time you got hit in the back, that was later.

WT: That's the time I got hit with shrapnel...that's what saved me – there was my cartridge belt and my regular belt, otherwise I would have come out of here.

KW: Other people saved by the Bible, you're saved by the belt.

CT: The Bible belt.

WT: So I came home and that was, that's it.

CT: You were in a hospital in Tennessee for a while, a mental hospital.

WT: They sent us closest to home, so they shipped us to Battle Creek, Michigan.

CT: At Custer, at Fort Custer..Hospital.

WT: Yeah. And I got my discharge from there and I came home.

KW: So, before you, before...You were drafted. Before you were drafted, what were you doing? Where did you live and what did you do?

WT: I lived in Chicago. I worked for Industrial Land Company. I was a spot welder. We used to make the disk lamps and stove lamps.

CT: He would have been...

WT: I would have got out of it.

CT: exempt, because two months after he was called in, they got a government contract. And he would have been exempt from going into

WT: because I was a foreman, and we were making these cat-eyes for tanks and jeeps, for night driving, so...there [when] I got out of service, and the company that I worked for, they moved from Chicago to Indiana, and I just thought, I felt I didn't want to move to Indiana.

KW: So then what did you do after the war?

090: JOBS AFTER THE WAR

WT: Well, I bounced around all over, trying to get a job,

CT: Swept floors.

WT: Because you had a disability, they wouldn't hire you. You couldn't operate a machine, you couldn't do nothing. Maybe a stock clerk, or a broom swiper, so I worked for, I got a job at

CT: Due to his mental

WT: Dryden Rubber Company, I was a stock boy and a cleanup boy, you know. Bring the supplies, and take the finished work away, clean up the place. Then I got into it with my supervisor...

CT: Alright, that's alright [laughter].

KW: Alright, so...

CT: After Dryden Rubber, what did you do?

WT: I worked for Hynes, you know, and Montgomery Wards,

CT: After we met.

KW: You did everything.

CT: I got jobs for him.

WT: So anyway, my superintendent was mad, got a whiff of it that the head superintendent was coming to me, asking for supplies, whether we had them or not. Well, he came to me, and I said "yes, we have them," he says we should take them and bring them upstairs right away. I said "okay," and my boss, that boss came down and he fired me right on the spot there. And uh, before I could get home, they called me up, and "Would I come back to work?" I said, "No thank you," I said, "the guy's been there for forty or thirty years, he knows all the head foremen in every department," I said, "I wouldn't get along." So anyway, I found out he got fired, about two months later.

KW: My goodness. Alright, so we're taking you all the way back then, we're going to go back right to the very beginning, when you, when you...you said you were inducted. You told me already. What was it like those first days you were in the Army?

WT: Well, it was, let's put it like... it was something new, you didn't know what to expect, or what you were going to get into. It really was a mystery.

116: PREVIOUS WORK WITH THE CCC

CT: Did they ask you what your jobs were prior to put you in a certain detail of any kind?

WT: No.

CT: Because he was in the CCCs, when he was sixteen to seventeen in Wisconsin, and I thought, and they planted half of those evergreens in Wisconsin. So, I thought maybe they asked you what you were in on.

WT: No, no.

CT: Because he did farming before that and he didn't, you weren't a truck driver or so forth, like.

WT: I don't know how I got the job, but I got the job on the farm. My mother and father made arrangements, somehow found out they needed a helper to work on a farm. So, I went, got the job, worked one week, got three dollars a week.

CT: From 5 in the morning,

WT: From 5 in the morning, to 9:30 at night, seven days a week. And I got beat out of my job, a tramp came by and was willing to work for a dollar and a half! He worked two weeks, and he quit. The farmer came back, wanted me to come back to work, I said "No thank you." Meantime I went and joined the Civil Service Conservation Corps. There I got twenty-one dollars a month, I worked 5 days, 6 hours a day, I got clothing, I got fed,

KW: Sounds like a better deal to me. So they didn't care when you went, when they drafted you,

136:AFTER THE CCC

WT: Then when the war broke out, they closed up the camps, so I got a job at Dryden, at a belt company, making belts,

KW: (Which is why they saved you.)

WT: and I got eight cents an hour. I brought home \$10.50. And I worked, I was a slave labor. I got the job, the boss came, he says, "You're doing a good job." I work a week, and he says "I want more work,"

CT: Piece work.

WT: "Okay." I did. He says, "Very good." And three weeks later he comes back, "I want more." But I couldn't do it. But there was a line half a block long, waiting for my job. They didn't care. They got everything they could out of me,

KW: You said that when you were drafted that they gave you an IQ test. Did they give it to you, like they did in, did they give it to you in a big room, or did they give it to you, were you alone or what?

WT: I can't recall that, but everybody, I think we were all in the one room.

CT: Probably one room.

WT: We were all in one room, it was a written test, you know.

KW: So you went overseas in 1944?

CT: Yes.

153: BASIC TRAINING

KW: So you were training for a year, year and a half?

WT: Yeah. I got eighteen months in the states, eighteen months overseas.

KW: So was that normal, was that usually what people did?

CT: Well, they had basic training, usually at one camp, and then sent you to another camp, for advanced basic training. That's what...

KW: So what did you learn?

CT: What did you learn?

WT: How to travel by night, by compass, if you didn't locate your food, was waiting for you, if you didn't find your area, you didn't eat that day.

KW: And you said you won a, how to shoot...

CT: How to shoot a rifle, and the equipment wasn't the best, even overseas it wasn't the best,

WT: No, that was about right.

CT: Was it better [overseas]?

WT: Yeah,

KW: Did you make friends there, or did you not get to know people.

CT: Did you make friends.

WT: No, all the friends from, they were gone. My buddy there, from basic training. When he went to Italy, I went to Europe. We corresponded, and he got killed...because, my letter came back, that he was deceased, so...

KW: So did you, so you didn't travel overseas, did you have any of the people that you had done your basic training with that were still with you?

WT: No.

CT: They kept splitting up

WT: Well now, what happened was, once, like I said they started breaking our company up right after maneuvers. They took a whole bunch out of each company. Then overseas, then, that's when we went to Texas they did the same thing. There were only about 25% of us left.

KW: My goodness. Was there a reason for that?

WT: Well, yeah, to sup – to fill in for the guys that got wounded and killed, that's how I imagine.

CT: And the buddies you went over with, they were killed in the invasion, were they not? You told me that.

WT: I guess so, I don't know.

178: LANDING AT NORMANDY

CT: He has no idea where he landed [at Normandy]. So many of the men know that they were at Omaha, Utah, Gold, whatever beach it was. He said it was pitch black and they had no idea where he landed. Because his friend brought back some of the sand from Omaha and gave him a vial of that sand. And he said, "I don't know where I landed." It was near St. Lo.

WT: All I know is it was a steep cliff...It was near, yes, because I remember going through St. Lo, that's why I know it was on that side.

CT: All he remembers is that horrible cliff, and it was muddy.

WT: It was raining, you'd take two steps and slide down, and start again,

CT: And the Germans were...were they still shooting from up there?

WT: Oh yes, those, you could hear bullets. The town was still smoldering, St. Lo was still on fire, then we seen soldiers bodies floating down the, along the shore, there was blood in the water, it was red. So. So. So now that's in mind, you know. You just can't overlook it.

CT: I wouldn't let him see Saving Private Ryan because I knew what it would do to him. But that he'd, that first twenty five minutes

WT: Anyway what happened then, they got trucks, they shipped us from this side of the peninsula to this side [West to East]. Then we were stationed here, and a commander, they told us to dig in, because we'll stay here a couple of days and then we'll move out. On the second day a colonel came up, gave us a briefing, and says "You guys don't expect to come home." He says. "If you go out there and you get killed, before you kill a German, well your, you wasn't trained properly." And he says if you killed five or more, and you got killed, you were well-trained, you were a hero. He says, "Don't expect to come home." And were stretched out and he says "Dig your trench holes here, and have your lunch because we might be shuffling off in the evening." Moving out. How are you going to eat? There's a trailer there. It's full of blood and body parts. Tss. Maggots crawling all over the thing. And you're sitting there and you're supposed to eat?

[silence]

KW: What were they trying to get you to eat? What was there to eat?

WT: We were lining up to get ready for the attack.

CT: Did you have a mess thing, or did you have your own food in a container?

WT: No, we had mess baskets. Knife, fork, spoon, cup.

CT: Kits. Mess kits.

WT: And, um, K-Rations. So we didn't ever have to use the mess kits. Because they were shot off and holes in it anyway. Bullets hit my back. They hit the back and my pack stood up. And they...they shot it off. My raincoat was like, I could sift spaghetti.

CT: Will you tell the recording about your being in that barn in France when you lost your hearing? And they have no record of it.

217: TEMPORARILY LOST HEARING/FIRST AID

WT: Well that, I don't know how that happened. Because we stopped at a place for the night and then I woke up next morning, I couldn't hear.

CT: From the, artillery.

WT: I don't know what it was from!

CT: You woke up in a barn.

WT: Yeah, and I went to the first aid station, and I couldn't hear, so they took me to the field hospital. They kept me there a week. I finally got my hearing back.

KW: Did they do anything, or did it just come back gradually?

CT: What did they do?

WT: I don't know. Examined me, they dug around in there.

CT: And he couldn't get help for that, when he got home, because they had no record of it.

WT: And I had to have proof in records.

KW: They didn't notice you [could] hear before the war? You think that they would know.

WT: Anyway, then finally I got my hearing back and I went back up to the front lines.

CT: I would like you to say, and you don't like to talk about it, about that Polish man.

WT: No, I don't want to go into that. No.

CT: Will you let me say?

WT: No.

KW: You're allowed to say you don't want to share something. It's alright. So, what was it like going from being a civilian to being a soldier?

WT: Well, we were, trouble was, nobody was here. All the friends that were, they were all overseas or they were...so you were, nobody's here.

CT: Kind of lonesome.

240: BROTHERS IN THE SERVICE

WT: Kind of lonesome. My brothers were all still in the service.

KW: Did they all go before you?

WT: No, I went first.

CT: No, that's why I was surprised they didn't send him back because he was the oldest boy, and all four went in.

KW: Were they all drafted?

WT: No, the three of us were, but the fourth one joined the Navy.

CT: Joined the Navy. He was in the Bay of Tokyo I believe. They were waiting to invade Japan.

KW: One brother was in the Navy, where were the others, do you know?

WT: The other one was with the 69th Infantry, I was with the 79th, and my other brother was with the 83rd, or the 82nd paratrooper

CT: Paratrooper. Casimir was a paratrooper medic in the Alps. And Joe, Joseph was in Europe, and I believe from a picture that we saw of him that he was one of those who shook hands with the Russians at the Elbe River. I believe, I believe so. Our friend in California, it was her brother Joseph, Joe, who was the originator of the shaking hands with the Russians. And he is now buried in Torgau, Germany.

KW: So you and all your brothers came back.

WT: Oh yeah. Yes.

KW: My grandfather and all his brothers were all in the service. [digression]

WT: My dad was going to be drafted. He had to sign up. He was, I think forty-five then. And he would be going in the next group. By age. And he was about ready to be called too. But he didn't have to go.

269: WWII MEMORIAL DEDICATION

CT: We were present at the dedication of the World War II Memorial [in Washington DC] last May 29 [2004]. We were there that day. We didn't face the stage but it's a good thing because we would have been way in back. We were in Section 2, where they showed everything on the screens. And it was really a beautiful day. You cannot believe the volunteers, how they treated everyone. It was wonderful. Sitting next to us was a man that had a cap on "I Survived Pearl Harbor." And he was in a wheelchair. And I said, "My goodness! All these people that came." That was a beautiful, wonderful thing. The Memorial is great. Awesome. I called WGN after we got back and spoke to Steve Cochran and told him about it. And he sent us a Lobstergram which we haven't used yet – we've had too many medical problems.

KW: So – You said that you were in tents in England, in open fields.

CT: When you first went to England.

WT: Yes.

KW: Do you remember where you, as you moved along, did you ever get to sleep inside?

WT: No, it was all nighttime.

KW: So you only moved at night.

288: ONLY MOVED IN THE DARK

WT: We didn't even know. We landed, it was dark. Dark, we got on to a train. They took us down, and unloaded us at dark. On the open field.

CT: They had no idea what cities they were in.

WT: We didn't know nothing.

KW: Well at least they didn't have to worry about you telling anybody, huh? Did you see a lot of towns as you were traveling?

WT: It was black out!

CT: They had the shades down.

WT: There were no lights. It was dark. All the street lights off.

295: LETTERS

KW: So did you write letters home?

WT: Ah, I did, when I had time, but not very often.

KW: Did people write to you?

CT: His sister.

WT: Sister, mainly.

CT: The others were in the service too.

KW: Did you receive your mail very often?

WT: No.

KW: So how did you get it when you did?

WT: Oh, they brought it to the front line. Under fire.

CT: There's, whatever they call them, the fellows that brought it, they brought the mail.

WT: The ones that brought the supplies like water and food to us.

CT: Oh, the supply people

KW: Did it take a long time, sometimes, for the mail to come?

WT: We don't know. I never kept track.

CT: See, I did not know Wally then, I was in sixth grade. So, I wrote to, those V-Mails, those letters, I wrote to my brothers. I had one brother that was in Heidelberg. And I wrote to him. My nephew, who is now 80 years old, living in Glenview, I wrote to him. He was a tail gunner in Italy, and never went on a plane until about ten years ago. Finally went on a plane. He wouldn't get on a plane. He was a tail gunner in the 8th Airborne, I believe it was. 8th. And so, lots of, I had quite a few people, you know, that way.

317: TALKING ABOUT THE WAR

WT: None of us talked about it. My brothers came home, they didn't talk about it. None of us talked about the war.

KW: Not at all.

CT: No, no.

KW: Was it too painful to talk about?

WT: I can't answer - I don't know.

KW: Or were you afraid to tell people?

WT: I don't know. Like I said, I was afraid I'd have more nightmares [before the interview began he'd discussed having five years of nightmares after he came home].

CT: I just, when we went to Washington DC last summer, is the first time I knew some of things that Richard [Tymczuk, Walter's brother] went through. I had no idea. Because they were supposed to invade Japan and they didn't. And he didn't want to tell me, even, that when that was cancelled because of the atomic bombs, that they, sailors, had to go on shore and put the bodies in body bags and throw them on trucks for cremation. But I never knew that. I said "Richard," you know, and he said "I, we just didn't talk about it." The people from Second World War did not discuss... You're hearing this all over in magazines and interviews and so forth.

WT: Lot of them don't talk today, yet.

CT: No, they don't. They had a, like a reunion, at Normandy for the fiftieth anniversary, and he [Walter] wouldn't go. He said that only the ones that were on the back lines, that weren't there really, they would go, go there. And I wanted him to go to the reenactment they had there at Montrose Beach [Chicago], he wouldn't go to that either.

340: *WOMEN SOLDIERS*

WT: And then, another thing I can recall now, was the Germans used women.

CT: The French women.

WT: They weren't German, they were Polish, or whatever nationality, Jewish women, for the front lines. Because when they opened fire, and we started shooting back, they started withdrawing and we could see them lifting their skirts up so they could run faster to get away. That's how we found out that they were women.

CT: Do you also want to mention in France, the women and children in the bell towers, shooting at you, and then when you killed them you discovered they...

WT: The Germans, we called for artillery, artillery shells hit the tower, and the firing stopped, so we went to investigate to see what was there, there was a woman with three children who was firing at us.

CT: She got in with the German soldiers because they gave her food, or helped her children, or what, and so they, the French women were shooting at the Americans.

357: FINDING FOOD IN FRANCE

WT: Another thing was, like our supplies sometimes wouldn't come to us. Even no K-rations. We were hungry. So we used to go to farmers and ask for food, you know. We used to go to the gardens and pull carrots or potatoes, and we used to make ourselves a stew. We could use our K-box and a pot of coffee and heat it and cook it. By the time it burned down, it was all done. We didn't know where the French kept their sausage. So finally it dawned on us, they kept them in the fireplaces, up there, smoked beef.

KW: Oh, to smoke them, and so you wouldn't find them.

WT: We wanted to buy them from them. They wouldn't sell it to us. So we said, "Will you give it to us? Buy it?" We'll take it any way.

KW: So you got to eat.

WT: Yeah. Some were generous, we gave them money for it, we didn't take it. The money we gave them, they wouldn't have to work for another five years. With the value of our money as it compares to theirs.

CT: We took a vacation, we went to, for the passion play in Oberammergau, in 1990. Coming back to the coast, we had to pass through areas where the hedgerows were. Where they had to go, and it was not good for him, for Walter. It was too many memories.

381: HEDGEROWS AND MINES

WT: Another thing that comes back to me now, it comes back. We were in the woods. We came out of the woods, and there was an open field. And I'd say about a couple hundred yards, or better, there was a hedgerow. We were afraid of them, hedgerows, because the Germans could be sitting behind them. So happened that they weren't there. Our whole company went across. Our poor medic took one step and he stepped on a mine. We got word later from the Head that there was enough mines in that field, it would take them ten years to get rid of them. How we got across, without stepping on one, we don't know. I don't know.

CT: War is not like the movies.

KW: Was it different...Had you ever been in another country before you went into the service?

WT: No.

KW: Was it different, did you think the trees were different, and the...

WT: We didn't know what to expect.

KW: So what did you find?

WT: Everything was a surprise, you know. What we knew of Europe or that we'd only seen in pictures or movies. That's about it.

CT: Was it Cas [Casimir Tymczuk, Walter's Brother] that visited your cousin in France?

WT: My sister did, yeah, and Cas.

CT: No, I mean during the war.

WT: After the war.

CT: He had a Polish cousin that lived in the woods in France, outside Paris, and he was able to visit, see him on one occasion. But Wally didn't, you didn't know about him. He ended up coming to this country and made the caramel candy at Brach's Candy for forty years.

KW: Being in Europe, did you find you had other relatives you didn't know about until later?

WT: No, just that one. Well, we had relatives but we still don't know, we never heard from them.

CT: In Poland.

418:LETTERS FROM POLAND AFTER THE WAR

WT: I had two uncles in Poland, they both ran out of Poland after the Russians hit them, I mean the Germans, and came to France, and we only heard from one, the other one we never heard. My mother used to write to them. Right after the war, I don't know, after about a year or two, my mother started getting letters asking for medicine. They'd send a prescription, she'd fill it and send them back to them. The first time, she did it. Six months later she got another letter, she went to the druggist, and the druggist said to her, "Lady, you don't want to fill this prescription. You've got to send enough medicine to cure the world."

CT: It was the Communists, they believed, that were forcing them to write these letters with the prescriptions, to get the medicine.

WT: They'd [Communists would] get the medicine, not them. So, my mother put a kibosh to that. And she wrote a nasty letter and we never heard from them anymore.

CT: And your father, your father wrote to his family,

WT: That was back in 19...

CT: 29? 30?

WT: Someplace in there.

CT: And finally their mail was returned. They must have been shipped to Siberia. So, he doesn't know any of his father's.

WT: No relatives known there either. From either side now.

448: OFF-DUTY ENTERTAINMENT

KW: Did you, they put a question in here, "How did soldiers entertain themselves when off duty?" Were you ever off duty?

WT: In basic training, yeah.

KW: So what did you do?

WT: We used to go to town and whoop it up.

KW: Whoop it up, huh?

CT: He never learned to dance because he could never get into the USO canteen.

WT: The lines were a block long. Two walked out and two came and went in.

KW: So what did you do instead? Just wait in line?

WT: Well, had some drinks downtown, or a movie, stopped at a tavern, had some beer, something like that. It was boom, what they used to call boom towns. They were towns just out to get everything they could out of the soldiers. Women, stuff like that.

KW: When you were in Europe, did you ever have time to visit anything?

WT: No.

CT: No, there was no R&R there, during the war.

WT: When I was in Paris in hospital, they wouldn't let us out either.

CT: And they, when you were, your mind was being boggled by the war, and then they asked you how long you were there, and you said, "six months" and you said "it's time you went home." It was very traumatic.

KW: I have a lady who was an army nurse who I am going to interview.

CT: Oh, is that Betty? Yeah, the one that belongs to the American Legion.

KW: When you were in the hospital, did you talk to the doctors and nurses? Did you think that they knew what they were talking about?

WT: No, they just'd see how you were doing. Check your blood pressure. But the first time I got to bed, I slept five minutes. I didn't need any more sleep. Because all those months we went sleepless – catnaps.

489: 23-HOUR DAYS, CLEANLINESS & UNIFORMS

CT: From three in the morning, when they'd shove off, go all day until the next morning two o'clock in the morning. Then they'd say "Dig your trenches, and get some sleep." And they'd just about get the trenches dug, and "We have to push off again." Got no sleep. They had no showers, let's see, how long did it take you?

WT: I had one shower in six months. My socks rotted on my feet. I had to take a bayonet and scrape the socks off. And my toenails were like this. I went to trim them with my trench knife, the nail flipped, I had a complete new nail underneath.

CT: And I guess the unit was getting infected with trench foot.

WT: Yeah.

CT: So they made them give the soldiers...

WT: The order came that they had to give us showers. Yeah, twenty degrees outside, you stripped, you ran through...

CT: Twenty degrees.

WT: Yeah.

[laughter]

KW: So you were worried someone was going to find you by the smell.

[laughter]

CT: They all smelled the same. They all smelled the same.

KW: Did you get to wear clean clothes ever? Or were you wearing the same thing most of the time?

WT: Yeah, I got clean clothes two times. I had clean clothes.

CT: Once in six months.

[laughter]

KW: You'd think they would fall apart like your socks.

CT: Well, the army clothes, they were so well made. They were wool, weren't they?

WT: Wool, yeah.

CT: They were well made. Boots too? Boots, your army boots?

WT: Yeah.

KW: You said when you came out of the hospital you didn't have anything anymore.

CT: They sent you home with what, fatigues? Or regular...

WT: I was supposed to get my duffel bag, my clothes, toothbrush, everything was to come with me. We got on the train, they said when we get to the post, we'll get our duffel bags. We never got our duffel bags.

CT: Never got any of their stuff back.

KW: So do you know where it went, or did it just...

CT: Disappeared.

KW: Just disappeared.

WT: All we had was the clothes we had on.

CT: How much did they give you...no, did your father come to pick you up or you came home by train from Michigan?

WT: No, I came on my own from Michigan. By train. They paid my fare.

538: OVERSEAS AND BACK

KW: How did you get back to the United States?

WT: Well, we landed from Europe in the north part of Virginia,

CT: By ship, by troop ship. But it was kind of a medical ship.

WT: It was all patients...wounded soldiers.

KW: Was it a really big troop ship, were there a lot of people?

CT: It was probably one of the original cruise line ships. Because they were taking over so many of them. When you went over, was it when you went over or when you came back

WT: We came [went over] on an English ship. We were mad then, too. They guys were blowing their tops. They said, "Our government gave us food, to feed us." They didn't use our food, they used their food.

CT: Terrible English food.

WT: They were terrible cooks. Some guys were so mad! They couldn't eat the stuff!

KW: English food not too tasty then.

CT: Oh, you came back on an English ship then.

WT: No,

CT: Going over, then.

WT: Yes.

KW: So on the way back, you were on an American ship?

WT: American ship.

KW: Did they feed you?

WT: Oh yeah. It only took us three days, two days or something to get across.

CT: Probably going over it took you a long time because they had to zig zag.

WT: We weren't going straight, we were going like this [zig zags hand] dodging the submarines or

CT: German ships or whatever.

KW: So did you worry about that, when you were on your way?

WT: We didn't know that then. We didn't know that, that we were going all different directions. But what took us so long? Then we realized, hey! That's what was happening. The radar guys used to pick up the submarines and then dodge. So.

CT: Anything else?

KW: So let's see, what did I get to?

WT: That's about all I could...

CT: Well, she'll have

581: BACK TO SCHOOL

KW: So, I want to know though, too... You told me that afterward, did you go back to school at all, ever?

WT: No.

CT: Yes, you did!

WT: What?

CT: You went back to school. Because he left school in the sixth grade in Chicago or was it Wisconsin?

WT: Wisconsin.

CT: Wisconsin. And he left in sixth grade. When we met I was 16, and he was 27. And I said, "Use your GI Bill and go back to school." So they tested him to go back to grammar school and he had missed so much, that at the age of 27, they put him in second grade. That was Dante [?] Elementary School. And he finished that. And then he went to Crane Tech for a year. He got the equivalent of a high school diploma.

WT: Well, I have a bad memory. I cannot store information very long or much. When I was a baby, I was hit with a shovel. My dad was working in the back yard. He had a pile of dirt. He was throwing the dirt against the house for the, because it was raining and the water was standing there. And I was playing [TAPE SIDE CHANGES, 616:] Like I say, I wasn't paying attention, I was a kid. He just took the shovel, and I ran across, and he hit me right across [the forehead], I have a scar right there. I think there must have been some brain damage done there, I don't know.

KW: Well, I think you remembered a lot today.

CT: Yes, he did, he remembered a lot.

WT: I still, today, I am not able to spell.

CT: He can read, but

KW: Well, she's a champion speller, [Celine told me that she won several spelling bees at the Niles Senior Center] you don't need to spell.

CT: I fill out all the information.

WT: I can read, I can do anything, I can add, but to spell, that's a lost cause.

KW: You know, I had an English teacher who said being able to spell had nothing to do with intelligence. And she said it didn't matter what you did, some people just can't spell.

WT: I'll say like this, I'll say "Bay, B-A-Y." I'll write B-A, and I got to think a while...oh, Y!

CT: It takes him a while to remember.

WT: Or sometimes I can't think of the whole word at all.

[laughter]

KW: Just the spelling, who cares?

WT: I don't need to.

CT: Do you have any more questions?

KW: Well, yeah, did you stay in contact with anybody that you knew in the service, after?

WT: No.

CT: They were probably killed or injured.

WT: A lot of them were from different parts of the States.

CT: Country.

631: A GOOD BUNCH OF GUYS

KW: Did you learn anything from meeting people from different places? Or you didn't have time to.

WT: No, we didn't have no time, we didn't get to socialize. In fact, I should[n't] have made a mistake, I thought of it a couple times but I didn't have a pencil, I didn't have no paper...I would have liked to get the names or addresses. But that fellow that I told you we got...

CT: In Italy...

WT: No, no, got up at the front, we were going along, the machine guns opened up, we hit the ground, my buddy on my left got killed. And we got together a letter from his mother. Yeah.

CT: You didn't tell me that.

WT: Well.

CT: How did she know your address?

WT: She wrote it to the company.

CT: Wrote to the army and asked?

WT: No, the kid, must've wrote to [his] parents and talked about us.

CT: Oh, okay.

WT: So, I don't know, she sent the letter to one of the guys, and the guy read it to us.

KW: What did she say?

WT: That I can't remember anymore. So, she says the guy says that we were a good bunch of guys, that's all. That's all.

CT: Some good buddies.

WT: Yep.

KW: Did you call each other by your real names, or did you call each other by nicknames?

WT: I can't recall, I think his name was Smith. That's all I can recall.

CT: Did you call each other by your first names, or did you

WT: We never talked. I didn't call anybody.

CT: No, I mean when you were in basic training

WT: Oh, those guys, I don't know.

KW: You didn't even say your names.

CT: Were you called by a nickname or a real name.

WT: Depends what the name was.

KW: Well, what did they call you?

WT: Wally.

KW: Just Wally. Did you ever try to stump them by making them spell your name?

WT: No. Oh! The sergeant. Who called out roll call, the first time, he came up, he started calling the names out and came to mine, and he said "How did you pronounce that name?" I told him like "Tim-Chuck, two boys, Tim and Chuck." He had no trouble from then on.

KW: I don't think it's hard. But I grew up in Cicero.

WT: Sometimes I explain it, I say, "You know Y, change it to an I. CZ to CH."

CT: His dad... Where were you in Cicero?

KW: [digression]

CT: His dad and Cas lived in the house next to where the new fire department is. Sixteenth and Central. Right there. They lived there, the house right next door.

664: VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

KW: So, did you join a veterans' organization?

WT: Well, I did join the Catholic War Veterans, but I didn't keep up with them.

CT: At one time you were with the Elmwood Park, was that VFW?

WT: The VFW.

CT: Now we belong to Morton Grove American Legion.

WT: Well, the VFW, all that was was party-time. There was no...

CT: They did a few things but not the way that they do here.

KW: So what did they do at the American Legion that's different?

CT: Well, we sponsor the baseball team.

WT: The boy scouts, girl scouts

CT: We give, well, the Auxiliary gives the medals to the ROTC at Lane Tech, I did that once. We do the thing for poppy day to collect for the fellows in the hospitals, and, oh my gosh, we've got a whole list of things...

KW: So it's a lot of service.

CT: Oh yes, it's a service [for the] community, we do things for that. The Auxiliary does a lot for them. We help the post with things that they do, and we do things on our own.

WT: We donated money to this American Legion post down South that was destroyed by fire, was it?

CT: Yeah, they do that. And they're sending boxes to Iraq. They're filling boxes and sending them.

KW: Oh, we send paperbacks [from the library] all the time.

CT: Yeah. And, oh my gosh.

KW: All that stuff. Do you enjoy it?

CT: See, before Morton Grove bought the building and the property, we had fish frys, and we had Bingo, and he used to work Bingo, and I used to, we both did the carnival when we had the carnival. Now Morton Grove handles all that.

WT: Morton Grove cut all that out.

CT: Well, they remodeled the building and we can't have the fish frys.

WT: I understand they might get the Bingo back because they discovered they could make a percentage.

CT: Everybody wants a nickel and a dime from us.

WT: So they might decide to reopen the Bingo.

CT: Morton Grove's in dire circumstances the way the city and the state and the nation is.

KW: Now, you said you joined the Catholic group, are you Catholic?

WT: Yeah.

KW: In the service, was it different to be Catholic?

CT: No, they were the ones who...

WT: Before you get discharged, they ask you, "Who do you want to represent you?" I didn't know, I said "I'm a Catholic, okay."

KW: So you didn't notice that you were Catholic while you were serving.

WT: No

696: RELIGION OVERSEAS

KW Did you have a chaplain?

WT: We always had chaplains, but they were always in the rear end. Nearer the troops, they didn't.

CT: What did you do over there, in Europe? Did they have mass for you?

WT: No, we did stop at Christmas and we were going through some town, we went to town into a church that had no roof on it, but we had mass there.

CT: Oh, that's good. [digression]

KW: And you think, at least your socks don't have to be scraped off.

CT: The Cubs have won a few. Opening day was his birthday last Friday. Eighty fourth birthday...

709: MORE VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

WT: Anyway, to get back to, when you get discharged, they ask you who you want to [unintelligible].

CT: To represent you.

WT: But I didn't keep up with them.

CT: No, he didn't. He didn't pay their dues or anything.

WT: Because I joined the, your [brother], my brother-in-law,

CT: The VFW in Elmwood Park

WT: He was a commander there, he talked me into joining.

CT: That was a long ride out to Elmwood Park.

WT: But it was all drinking party, that's all.

CT: Mostly. But then they wanted us to help with the baseball thing, the baseball field. He said, but that was his [Walter's] business. He was a landscaper. Maintenance.

WT: But they wanted me to do it for free. They didn't know that sod costs 65c a roll.

CT: That was then.

KW: So you joined a veterans' organization, and I know you went to the World War II Memorial, and you talked about that. And you haven't gone to any other reunions?

WT: Well,

CT: He doesn't know where anybody is. Matt knows where his

WT: Yeah, because he was with a company. I was separate.

CT: But you were changed so often, you don't know where anybody is.

WT: We got changed and mixed up right from the States. We got overseas, we were split up again. Then we got into France: two guys were dropped off there, three over there, by the time we looked at the company – there were only two of us. We didn't even get a chance to get acquainted and know their names.

KW: Do you think that if there were reunions that had to do with you, would you want to go?

WT: If I knew of any, yes. I looked at *American Legion* magazine, where it states that certain veterans, Company So wants to get together with somebody who knows them. I haven't found somebody yet that's requesting me.

CT: Now his eyes've got so bad, the print is small and it's hard to read.

WT: I've been following them, to see if anybody would like to get together with, but, there's nobody there that was with my outfit, so

CT: And in the same magazine, they have an article, "If you know of this person," to verify some medical happening. They want you...But, see, he wouldn't even know how to appeal for that. That's why I wrote to St. Louis [NARA], I was telling you. But I haven't heard from them and I don't...

KW: They take a long time.

CT: Does it, really? Because I was really confused. I thought he was right there on June the sixth [at Normandy], and according to this, he didn't leave the states until June 27th [1944]. So he couldn't have been there on June 6th then.

WT: No, I wasn't. I was in the peninsula, Normandy peninsula.

CT: I thought you... Yeah, it says here "Normandy. Date of Arrival, July 5th, 1944."

WT: Because there was still fighting going on at the tip of the peninsula. In other words, France – this peninsula went like that [gestured], well, we landed in here. There was still fighting over here. Because we sat back, back here waiting, until they secured that. And then that's when Patton came in with his tanks, and we, then we shoved off, we went around the coast.

KW: You said you traveled by train, and you traveled by trucks, and you traveled by foot, and you were on the ship. Was there anything else I missed?

WT: No.

CT: Didn't you go on a cart? On a horse cart or anything over there?

WT: No, no. Like I said, we got off the ship, it was dark, onto a train, we sat in a dark train

757: IN ENGLAND AND MOVING OUT

CT: That's in England.

WT: Yeah, and we moved all the way down, could have been Dover or that way. Then they unloaded us, put us in an open field, we set up tents, pup-tents, we slept underneath the tents.

KW: Did you have a tent to yourself? Or did you have to share?

WT: No, each had their own. So. And then, like I said, a couple days later they said, "Take up your tents, we're going to be moving out." Took us to the shipyard, boarded us on ship on the 20th [July, 1944] in the morning, and by that evening and then morning we hit the beach there. Oh, we got a rough ride there in that water.

CT: On the barges?

WT: That thing, the channel was rough!

CT: The guys, if they weren't sick when they landed, they were sick going over. They were really in bad shape.

WT: Of course, they had to postpone the invasion anyway. They postponed it one day on account of the weather.

KW: So, were you, had you ever been on the water before?

WT: Not in a ship, no. I'd been on a boat, fishing.

774: HOW DID YOUR SERVICE AFFECT YOUR LIFE AND YOUR HEALTH?

KW: Never that choppy on a boat. So, the other question, well, they say: How did your service and experiences affect your life and your health?

WT: Well. I got to the point where I keep things to myself. I don't discuss.

CT: He was very bitter.

WT: I don't carry conversations very often.

CT: Mentally, it affected him.

WT: I feel bitter, all way around.

KW: Sorry you had to serve at all.

WT: Because, the whole darn trouble is, when I was born, we were deprived of everything, because it was Depression. And like I said, after I got out of the CCs, what did we get? Slave labor, which didn't make us happy...

CT: They didn't have unions or anything then. And when he got out of the CCCs, their letters got mixed up, and he didn't know that the folks had moved back to Chicago. So he hitchhiked from Stevens Point, Wisconsin to Chicago. Because he didn't have any money to take a train or bus or whatever they had. Didn't have busses, I guess. So he hitchhiked home to Arlington, Arlington Street?

WT: Yeah, 4020 Arlington, Chicago.

793: OPINIONS ABOUT WAR

KW: So then, did having military experience change how you thought about war or the military? Or did you...what did you think about it?

CT: Before the war, before any of the war, did you ever think about war at all?

WT: No. No.

CT: Like the First World War? No, you didn't think about anything like that?

WT: No. Only time I can remember, a friend of my folks was in World War I, he came out of the service, he came and stayed with us a couple of days. Adolph Mazur [?]. He stayed with us a couple days.

CT: Did he talk about, did you

WT: No, I didn't know. We were taught to only talk to people when we were spoken to.

CT: Seen and not heard.

WT: And if they spoke to us, we answered, and then we went to our own room. And we were shut off from them, whatever was going on.

CT: The adults were together and the children were together.

KW: So after the war, did you think anything about war?

WT: No

CT: Mentally, he was in a bad way.

KW: Now, when we're at war, do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing.

WT: I don't think we should have been in one. I don't think we should have been in it. But, who am I to say? Because all those poor guys. It's not a war, this...it's like gangsters, like Capone.

CT: It's not just the Americans, but look at all the people over there who have been killed. Thousands and thousands that we'll never know about.

[silence]

816: PASSING A CONCENTRATION CAMP

WT: Another thing I could remember, that I forgot to mention was, we passed a concentration camp.

CT: Oh, yes.

KW: Oh my goodness. Do you know which camp it was?

CT: It was in France, it had to be.

WT: Yes.

KW: What did you...were there people there?

WT: I went over, smelled the smoke, the odor.

CT: Smelled the furnaces. You know how some people deny that the Holocaust ever happened? Well, he can tell you that it did.

WT: I've seen it. Because we had to move on, we couldn't stay because we were

CT: They did not...Was it already evacuated, or opened up?

WT: Yeah, it was. There were still a couple patients, guys running around nude. They didn't get a chance to get in to, we didn't get in time to save the rest, because it was too late.

CT: Some of the other units did rescue them, because the Germans had run away, so they rescued the guys. But Walter's unit did not do that. But he said, "I smelled it. I know it happened."

WT: Well, I've seen the enclosure. I've seen the guys running around nude there.

CT: Waiting to have the gates opened.

WT: They stripped them of all their clothes, they took their clothes away, all their possessions. Marched them into the chamber. That's a bitter thing in your throat. It chokes you up.

CT: I'm surprised you ever married a German. I'm Alsatian, German and French.

WT: So.

KW: So was there anything else, that we didn't talk about?

WT: I can't think of anything off-hand.

CT: You don't want to mention your animosity for the French.

WT: No. That's it.

KW: I want to thank you so much,

WT: Do you want to look at some souvenirs?

END COUNTER 845