Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Oral History Interview with Albin Zwiazek
52nd Coast Artillery, Battery C, 1937-1939
Interviewed by Tom Hoffman, NPS
February 17, 1980
In 2 CDs.
Transcribed by Jo Anne Carlson 2008

**Al Zwiezak on guard duty**

**Al and Marge Zwiezak in 2003**

Today is Sunday, February 17, 1980 and this is Tom Hoffman, Park Technician Historian sitting here in the Museum Building and I have an Army Veteran who served here at Fort Hancock and I would like to introduce him to you. What is your name, sir?

AZ: My name is Al Zwiazek, well the full name is Albin Zwiazek. I was stationed here from 1937 to 1940 as a member of Battery C, 52nd Coast Artillery Railway.

TH: Al is a very good friend of mine and his wife is here with us along with Elaine Harmon our Museum Technician, and we have gotten to know Al over a couple of years now. How long have we known each other?

AZ: I'd say about four years now.

TH: Yeah, since 1976 when we pulled off the first Veterans' Reunion and you've been coming back. We've had a lot of good times here. A lot of rush times, unfortunately, because I've been doing this, that and the other thing. Kind of lucky to get together today. But here we are and this is always something that I've wanted to do to have a taped interview with you because you're very knowledgeable about the time you served here at Fort Hancock and I'd like to begin with how you got into the Service. Do you remember that?

AZ: Oh, I remember that (LOL), I thought it would be a good place to get three meals a day since it was during the Depression. I was eighteen years old and things weren't too good. So, I saw the people around occasionally in uniform. So, I thought I needed a career. I enlisted in Newark, NJ on February 20, 1937. I came down here. It was a Saturday morning and another fella was with me. A fella by the name of Vic Bruzek. We enlisted together. I didn't know him. I met him in the recruitment office. We came here and we hung around in civilian clothing for three days because the 22nd was Washington's Birthday and everything was closed down, the Quartermaster. We slept in various bunks over the weekend. It sure looked sad. It was in the winter time and the place was deserted and abandoned. I didn't know what I was getting into. I was kind of leery when I saw the place.

TH: You mean Fort Hancock?

AZ: Yeah, Fort Hancock, right, and it was such a long way from town. But it wasn't too bad. I spent almost three years here. I was in the outfit for three years but we went elsewhere once in awhile. Total time with C Battery was three years.

TH: How did you get down here from Newark? Did you take a train or a bus?

AZ: Yeah, we came down by train and got off in a place called Highland Beach on the east side of the river. There was a railroad bridge that came across.

TH: Where the highway overpass is now used to be called Highland Beach.

AZ: Right, they had little railroad station there. We got off there and the man at the station told us to walk down to the Main Gate. They had a sentry down there was Corporal Charles Gandy, I remember him, he was on duty there and he was carrying a .45. I was fascinated by the .45. Little did I know that a few days later I'd be firing a .45 like that right here by the Mortar Battery.

TH: Was there a small range over there?

AZ: It wasn't officially a range. There was an embankment there where we would set up targets against the wall there and fire. Sergeant Stevenson took us out there, Sergeant William O. Stevenson. And he took my pistol and he said, "don't you fellas drop your pistols into the sand because they're tough to clean." you know, semi-automatic pistols. He dropped mine. Soon as he said that, he dropped mine. (LOL) I said, oh no, I'm the guy's that's gonna clean it. (LOL)

TH: You mean this is a few days after arriving?

AZ: Yeah, several days later. They didn't call it Basic Training when they trained you in those days they called it "Recruit Drill".

TH: Really?

AZ: And then we had a Corporal by the name of Hinchey. He had maybe 25 years of service then. He took over and trained maybe 12 of us. Then Sergeant Stevenson took over from Corporal Hinchey a week or two later and we went out back here and fired the pistols. Then of course later, we went to Dix, it was called Camp Dix then to fire rifles 'cause we didn't have a range here. We learned a lot about Infantry. A lot of people thought that being in the Coast Artillery we didn't know anything about Infantry. We could revert to Infantry any time. We needed Infantry troops, you know. But I found the three years here very interesting. The guns.

TH: Oh, yeah I want to get into that, but you mentioned you were fascinated by that .45 that the Corporal was wearing?

AZ: Yeah, it looked sort of flat instead of like a revolver does. Something new, I never saw a .45 automatic like that.

TH: Was he wearing it on his pistol belt?

AZ: The people at the gate wore black Sam Browne belts and black boots. We wore boots and breeches in those days. We wore brown boots but the men on the gate wore black boots. And the Military Policemen wore black boots and black Sam Browne belts. Leather. Of course the holster was black, also.

TH: Were they expecting you when you arrived?

AZ: I don't know if they expected us, but he knew what to do with Recruits. He told us to wait there for a bus and that's the only time we got a free ride on that bus. Used to cost ten cents to ride that bus. He said to go to Headquarters and the bus driver showed us where Headquarters was. There was an old gentleman there by the name of Master Sergeant De Lyle, he was the Sergeant Major. He gave us the choice of Batteries. He said you can have E Battery or C Battery. So we asked which Battery has the bigger guns. He said C Battery they have twelve inch mortars. OK, we'll take C Battery. And that's what happened. He showed us from the window upstairs in Headquarters the window facing the Parade Ground, that's where his desk was. He showed us the building there and which Batteries were in which buildings. We just chose C Battery, we didn't know people in either Battery. Headquarters didn't need anybody because we were assigned to a gun Battery.

TH: So coming in like this, did they issue you clothing right away?

AZ: No, like I said before, we had to wait for three days because everything was shut down, the Quartermaster and what not. So the day after Washington's Birthday which was the 23rd of February in 1937, an acting Supply Sergeant by the name of Edward Flaherty took us to the Quartermaster and we were issued clothing and we were dressed and we had to report to the Battery Commander so he could look us over. His name was Richard C Lolly was a Captain. We were told how to salute and what not and he took a

look at us and decided whether the clothing fit right or not and if there was anything to be corrected he'd tell us what it was and that was about it.

TH: Do you recall what you were issued to start you off?

AZ: We were issued a pair of boots, two pair of GI work shoes, one pair of garrison shoes, that were dress shoes. They were above your ankle. Just like the GI shoes but they were better than the heavy GI shoes.

TH: What color were they?

AZ: They were brown, russet I guess you would call it.

TH: Right.

AZ: Then one pair of boots, two pair of breeches, two blouses, two flannel shirts, two khaki shirts, a campaign hat, a garrison cap, a garrison belt, which they did away with when the War came, the leather belt, underwear and socks. We had white underwear then and white socks. Later on it was olive drab. And the regimental insignia. Not the regimental insignia, the U.S. and later on, the red insignia we had to buy ourselves from the PX. The scarlet insignia with the railroad locomotive.

TH: With the 52nd Railway.

AZ: You had to buy that.

TH: How much was that going for, do you recall?

AZ: I think it was like sixty five cents.

TH: For a pair?

AZ: For a pair. We make seventy cents a day so it was almost a days pay.

TH: Wow, in the Army.

AZ: Twenty-one dollars a month and they took out a quarter for the Old Soldiers' Home. So you had $20.75. So you went in debt right off the bat. You were issued canteen checks so they encouraged credit. You were issued these checks and you used them up and on pay day you had to pay back. Oh, and they also issued a ticket that cost $1 and there were three places on it that the barber punched within the month and that sort of forced you to get three haircuts each month. 'Cause every ten days for the average haircut.

TH: Was this the traditional crew cut?

AZ: Well, it wasn't that bad, it was sort of like a modified crew cut. They weren't too strict on that. The Battery Commander didn't want your hair to come down below your eyebrows. You know, if you combed it down, it shouldn't go down below your eyebrows. One fella defied the Battery Commander one day. He went out and got a haircut and we had inspection and his hair was a little too long so the Battery Commander told this man to go back and get his hair cut again. He went back and got it shaved to the scalp. The BC got teed off and put him on KP. (LOL)

TH: They had a way of dealing with the wise guys.

AZ: Yeah, there were a few around.

TH: How'd you find that clothing, did you find it comfortable?

AZ: Oh, I liked it. At first the boots and the breeches were uncomfortable because I never wore anything like that. You know the breeches were – right below your knee – they were kind of tight against your leg.

TH: Yeah, they tapered and really fit your leg.

AZ: They were snug, you know, and we weren't used to that, we were just used to slacks. So this Sergeant Flaherty, who I learned later on became a Major during the War. He was a nice man, says you guys are wearing double EE width shoes because your feet will flatten out from carrying that 75 pound pack. (LOL) Things like that. I was issued double EE. I wear D now, D width. But he knew what he was talking about, although he was an Acting Supply Sergeant. The Supply Sergeant was on furlough. The clothing was good, it was warm and I felt proud to be wearing a uniform. Kept my stuff neat. I couldn't wait for the first time I got a pass so I could go home and show my family what a young soldier looks like.

TH: How long did that take for you to get that first pass?

AZ: I think maybe, about a month, four or five weeks maybe.

TH: So they kind of broke you in here first, got you used to Army life then you were able to go home.

AZ: They gave you a pass, a weekend pass, like after Inspection. And you know, we had no money, so it was rough getting home. We used to hitchhike from the bridge here in Highlands, or, if we were fortunate enough, get on a boat here after inspection on a Saturday morning.

TH: The Army operated boat?

AZ: The Army operated two boats use to come in here: the *ORD*, *General E.O.C. ORD*, a Mine Planter, or the *ORDNANCE* which was like a "tender" for the Army. They used

to go up to the Battery in New York or the Brooklyn Army Base to Governors Island. If we could make it, after inspection, we would run and get on this boat and get off anywhere they would let us off, Fort Jay, the Army Base or the Battery. Pier A at the Battery was where they stopped most of the time. We'd get the subway up to Chambers Street Ferry to get over to Jersey again.

TH: Yeah, did that cost money?

AZ: No, it didn't cost us anything. We stood up. There was no place to sit. The *ORD* was a little faster than the *ORDNANCE*. The *ORD* was the Mine Planter. That took about an hour and forty minutes up to Pier A. The *ORDNANCE* took a littler longer than that maybe another ten minutes.

TH: That was a great transportation system, wasn't it?

AZ: It was interesting to me because prior to that I went up the Hudson River once on a grammar school graduation trip to Indian Point and this was very interesting going up the Bay.

TH: Did most of your fellow soldiers and friends, did they like it? How did you find it along with them? Was it an adventure?

AZ: You mean being here in the Service?

TH: No, I mean going up on the Steamboat.

AZ: Everyone seemed to enjoy it. It was like an excursion, a day out. Free!

TH: Was that utilized more, Al, was that used, in your estimation, did they use that, when you had a pass to just get off the Base for a little while, do you think they used that more, or did they just go to the little towns here?

AZ: I think that most of the fellas, who came from New Jersey or New York State or New York City, used to go home. And the older men, they would go to the local towns. The ones like maybe had no families or the families were too far away or they were in the Army so long that they forgot their families. Some people that were career men, they never went home, they'd go to Long Branch, Asbury Park. Like one fella, Frank Hime, he used to say "Ash-bury". He could never say Asbury Park, he used to say "Ash-bury". They'd go to Long Branch or to Highlands to "Skinny Wilsons". I was never there. I just heard of this place.

TH: Of course, sure. (LOL)

AZ: Clamtown Jessies, I wasn't old enough to drink. (LOL) Course they had Clamtown Jessie over there (LOL)

TH: That was the name of the local….

AZ: This lady I used to, be around. (LOL) The older guys used to go there, I never saw the place. Most of us used to hitchhike home but if you got out of Inspection too late, you know, you'd just have to get out on the road and hitchhike. But, if you were fortunate to get out early, you could make the boat.

TH: I guess, this day, right now, today, reminds you of the days you used to hitchhike during the winter. Nice and cold.

AZ: Yes, very cold.

TH: Nothing has changed, in that respect, right? (LOL)

AZ: The road looked just as desolate today but I was in a warm automobile. I remember I stood on the corner in Leonardo one day and the detectives came by and told me to quit hitchhiking. Get lost. That's the way it was. In those days the people didn't care too much for soldiers and I think the soldiers were better disciplined during peace time than they were during war time. I spent eight and a half years here in the Army, most of it during War. So I could talk with knowledge.

TH: Yeah, you saw the pre- World War II Army and also during the War.

AZ: I know they lowered the standards during the War and they had more discipline problems. And everybody accepted soldiers then. You had discounts and everybody was a friend of the soldiers. But before the War, you didn't rate too well.

TH: Were most of the soldiers from the New York/New Jersey area?

AZ: I would say that most of them were from New York/New Jersey. Some from Pennsylvania, the Bailey brothers, the Senets sp? brothers. Two sets of brothers were here. I'd say most of them were from upper New York State, New York City, Long Island and New Jersey. Many from New Jersey. Delaware, a fella named Rossi from Delaware. And one fella from Wilmington, Delaware, I don't remember his name. Another guy, Canning, from New Castle Delaware. I should sound a little more intelligent, I shouldn't say died. That's the way I usually talk.

TH: That's the way we all talk.

AZ: I was sort of afraid of the Officers at the beginning, of the Noncoms, also. I said jeez, don't get in trouble, you have three years to serve, you know, behave. Some fellas, didn't behave. Some small things that civilians never thought about, here you were punished for it.

TH: They were a lot stricter in the Army that you remember when you first joined up.

AZ: I was so afraid of rank, I never got in any trouble here. Three straight years here. Well, I never got into trouble after that either, but….They were tough. The Corporal was someone I had to contend with. He was in charge. He didn't wear fatigues when we went out on detail, he was in class A uniform. You wore fatigues. He didn't dirty his fingers. Just didn't get dirty. We did a lot of work a lot of physical labor. In the winter time we chopped wood, shoveled coal…

TH: What kind of wood was it?

AZ: Old scrap lumber that they would chop for fire wood. They'd knock down maybe a shed or something and we'd chop it up and deliver it to the Officers or the Noncoms quarters. Shovel coal, paint barracks, inside. Then all summer long from early spring we were busy with the guns. There was not much fatigue, and that was hard work too, on the guns, you know. We fired our regular guns that belonged to our Battery. Then we'd fire other guns that were disappearing guns. And the aircraft guns down where the present Visitors Center is, three inch anti-aircraft guns, French .155's…

TH: One fifty five millimeter guns, right.

AZ: The modern days they had rubber tires with metal cleats on them. They were old but they were good guns, they were accurate.

TH: One thing I'd like to get into first is, you were a new Recruit and you were sent over to which Barracks here?

AZ: First Barracks that my buddy and I were sent to was number 23. Building 23. Twenty-five is the first one, twenty-four and the 23 the third one down. That Barracks belonged to C Battery and then the north end of Building 74 was the main part of C Battery and the south portion of Building 74 was E Battery and Building 22 belonged to E Battery.

TH: How do you remember them?

AZ: I like them, nice warm Barracks. It was cold out when we came here. But you always knew that if you went out on detail you could come back to a nice clean, warm barracks.

TH: They had the big rooms then, didn't they, the nice wide open Squad….

AZ: Large Squad rooms, right. The Noncoms slept in the small rooms. Not Corporals, Corporals slept with their squads. But from Sergeant on up, I think I mentioned once before to you, First Sergeants, three First Sergeants I had in this outfit C Battery, were single. They lived in the Barracks, they had a room in the Barracks. Well, each one had the same room. When one left and the next one replaced him. But the married Noncoms had rooms here in the Barracks but they had quarters on the Post and when there weren't enough quarters, some lived in town. They all had rooms here. No Sergeant ever slept

with the enlisted men. He was an enlisted man too but he was a Non-Commissioned Officer. But the Corporals did like I said before. The rank wasn't that plentiful in those days. During the War, Corporals walking Post and Sergeants and what not. In those days and you were a Sergeant you were like God, you were King of the Hill.

TH: They actually ran the…

AZ: They ran the Officers. I didn't know where they were most of the time but they weren't right out there directly with the men. They were out there during Parades with us or during firing season they were always out there. You had the Officer that was in charge of the Range section. You had the Battery Officers down at the guns. You had the Battery Commander. They were always there, all summer. From May when we first started working on the guns, they were always around. But during the winter, maybe they hibernated in their quarters or, where, I don't know. But they weren't around much.

TH: How many men in your Battery?

AZ: I'd say approximately, 200 men in our Battery. I don't know the exact amount I could count them up I got that home.

TH: I'm just interested in that time period, about how many men were in a Battery.

AZ: I'd say approximately 200. They were pretty good size Batteries.

TH: When you break it down, in each big Squad room, how many do you recall?

AZ; That one up in Building 74 was a very long Squad room. Upstairs I don't know how many we had in there. Maybe 30 or 40 men in a Squad room. You know, the ones in Building 23. There were two upstairs and there was one or two downstairs. All the bathing facilities were downstairs and the Squad rooms were upstairs. A couple of Noncoms rooms were up there. A room downstairs for the CQ in charge of quarters on duty. That's the guy whose in charge of putting the lights out, locking up the rifle racks, handing out the mail. He's in charge of quarters for a 24 hour period. His office was there and the main CQ was over in Building 74 and he was usually a Corporal or a Sergeant.
I hate to brag but when I was a Private First Class I was CQ in the main Barracks.

TH: What was your bunk like?

AZ: There was a metal bunk, I don't see any around any more. They were metal, painted white, and a large Quartermaster insignia on the front of it. All white, white enamel with a spring and mattress. You were issued two blankets and two sheets. And every week we sent our laundry out. We got two sheets back. Two sheets went out and two sheets came back. It was like four sheets in a way. Two sheets were out at Majeski's Laundry in Staten Island – Majeki, I think. We paid $1.80 for the whole month for our laundry. They picked it up once a week and delivered the clean stuff.

TH: Everything was stenciled with your name?

AZ: We had our Battery letter, C, and the last four numbers of your serial number. Mine was C-1408. Later on during the War, it was your last initial, Z-1408, but when I was here, it was C-1408 cause my serial number was 6901408.

TH: Where was that stencil? Was it on a certain corner?

AZ: Wherever you couldn't see the stuff. They picked a spot like on your shirt tails or in your cap too, your Garrison cap. The shirt in the back where the label is. It was indelible and it lasted a long time- in my Garrison belt, the boots inside.

I'm going to tell you a very short story about a fella who almost got me in trouble. He had a brother who needed a pair of GI shoes. And we were issued two pair each. I used to keep them nice and shiny and they were 8 ½ EE. And his brother wore 8 ½ s and this fella wore like 7s so he wanted to give his brother a pair. So he asked me to sell him a pair of mine. And I didn't want to do that. I didn't like to violate the rules. He talked me into it. I felt sorry for his buddy who was on relief or something. Welfare, they call it now. So I sold him this pair of shoes for two dollars. And he was walking out on a Saturday, right past the First Sergeant. His name was Herman Rappaport. He said "where are you going with those shoes". I'm taking them home. He looks in and sees C-1408 the other guys was C-1234 his serial number was 6871234. He calls me down and says (with an accent) "do you want to go to the little red schoolhouse?, its right here". What? I could have said he stole my shoes, but I didn't. This First Sergeant was strict but he was nice. He was the youngest First Sergeant I saw up to that point he had 14 years service then. He said, all right, give him back the shoes. He gave me back the shoes and took them upstairs and when nobody was around I gave the guy back two buck and I thought (to myself, you dummy). And that guy was hard luck. I met him later (LOL). He was a hard luck guy. But anyway, I almost got in trouble over that. I didn't intend to sell the shoes, but I felt sorry for him and gave in. I'll tell ya, it was wrong to do. Things like that could get you in a lot of trouble. The stuff was issued to you, not to be sold to someone. Its Government property. And we had a clothing allowance. Do you know about the clothing allowance? During the War, when your clothing wore out, you turned it in and were issued new clothing. Before the War, you got so much a day, so many pennies a day toward your clothing. Now, if you wore out something, you had to get it issued to you again, like a replacement pair. That was deducted from the money you had saved from the clothing allowance. If the soles of your shoes wore, you would go to a shoemaker for repair. They had a cobbler here. And he would repair the shoes and you would pay him from your own pocket. That way you didn't have to draw a new pair of shoes. And you saved your money in your clothing allowance. And you tried to economize in that way. It was good because you didn't waste the clothing. You didn't throw it around like they did later on during the War. And when I was discharged, I received $52 that I saved in three years on my clothing. It was sort of coincidental, 52nd Coast Artillery, that's how I remember that, $52. Some people got more some people got less, it depends on how many times you had to have something re-issued to you. We

were very careful with our clothing. And you had to look sharp. We stood inspection every Saturday morning and every time you had a Mount Guard, you stood inspection. I was just telling some fella the other day my rifle serial number was 374378 and that one of the nicest looking rifles in C Battery. I hate to brag, but people used to borrow it from me to go on guard. The reason for that was they would select two Orderlies, they always sent two extra men for Guard duty. And two Orderlies were selected by the Officer of the Day. One was the Colonel's Orderly and one was the Adjutant's Orderly. They walked across the street and instead of walking post they went to the Post Headquarters and relieved the other two Orderlies and they sat there all afternoon, went back to their Barracks at night, slept in their own Barracks instead of in the Guard House. The next morning they reported back to Headquarters and stayed there till noon, then they had a pass for a day and a half. A bonus for being Orderly. And the Orderlies were picked for their neatness and for their knowledge of the Army. The Officer of the Day would ask questions like "Who is the Chief of Staff?" "Who is the Secretary of War?" you know, different special orders that we had. Everybody knew the General Orders, you know, many question. And how you looked, how your rifle looked, pistol, whichever you were using. At the beginning it was pistols then when another Colonel took over it was rifles. And they watched for everything, haircut, things like that. The two neatest and sharpest men would become Orderlies. I hate to brag again, but I was Orderly lots of times. (LOL) I thought that would be of interest because they didn't do that later on.

TH: Oh yes.

AZ: And the Colonel's Orderly really didn't do anything. He sat there in case the Colonel wanted him. Once, Colonel Williford, a real stern looking Officer looked over at me, from his room he could see me in the other room, like an ante-room. Called me in. He said "sharpen this pencil". I walked over and sharpened the pencil and brought it back to him. The pencil didn't need sharpening. He just wanted to see how I walked, whatever, my military bearing was about, but the Adjutant's Orderly had a few duties to perform and I used to like to be Adjutant's Orderly too because the Orderlies wore a red brassard, like the Military Police wear a blue brassard, well the Orderly wore a red one. Nothing on it just a red band that went around your arm. I used to like to be Adjutant's Orderly because you had to walk around to various barracks and deliver flyers and orders to different Battery Commanders. And everybody saw you and said "Al made Orderly" "Al made Orderly", see. So you got some attention, some glory.

TH: Some status around the Post.

AZ: The Colonel's Orderly outranked the Adjutant's Orderly but he sat in there and nobody saw him but the Colonel and you know, you can't impress the Colonel. (LOL)

TH: That's great.

AZ: I heard some lady talking at the Visitors Center talking about the General's Quarters, the General. All the while I was here, they had no Generals here.

TH:  It was usually a Lieutenant Colonel or a Colonel.

AZ:  The three Commanding Officers I had were full Colonels.  One became a Brigadier General and they transferred him out.  That was General Gardner.

TH:  Yeah, he was a Colonel here but then …

AZ:  He was promoted to General.  They pinned the stars on here but then he shipped out. He went elsewhere where the job rated a General.  This Post didn't rate the rank of Brigadier General.  But I understand that later on during the War when the Post expanded, they needed a General.

TH: In fact, General Gage, who commanded New York Harbor Defenses, was also a Colonel here.  He was a Colonel in charge of the 7th Coast Artillery Regiment, actually, and then he became a Brigadier General but he stayed on because as a Brigadier General he was also in charge of the New York Harbor Defenses in World War II too, so I know what you mean.  I want to get back to your bunk, though, because you mentioned that the bed…

AZ:  Did I skip over that?

TH::  No, I'm glad, though, you just keep it going.  That's the idea of Oral History, all the information in your memory.  It's just so easy to get off on one thing.  I want to get back to the bunk because, there is an example, the Park Service has one of those beds that you're talking about.  Did you have a "name thing" in front?

AZ:  You had a little, I have one of those at home, they called it a "bunk tag" and we used to kid each other about being a Recruit and what  not.  If you had a year's service and another guy had only eleven months service you'd say "gee, your bunk tag hasn't stopped swinging yet, what do you know"  (LOL)  In other words the tag was still swinging.  It had your name on it, you serial number, I think your rifle number, your bayonet number and your pistol number on the tag.  And you slept head to foot.  I don't know if you knew this but you never slept where two men had their heads in the same position.  In other words if this man in the first bunk slept with his head towards the wall, the man in the next bunk slept with his feet by the wall.  That was to prevent the respiratory disease from …

TH:  spreading…

AZ:  ….Spreading of colds and what not.  Sometimes when we had more men the bunks were close together like in the summer.  In the winter some of the men were out on furlough.  That's the only time you could get a furlough in the Coast Artillery was in winter.  They couldn't spare the men in the summer time.  We were always busy with all these Cadets from West Point, National Guards and all of them.
Getting back to the bunk, we had two sheets.  We had to roll over the sheet the width of a piece of cardboard that comes out of a shirt washed or cleaned?  A piece of cardboard

that's maybe eight or nine inches across. We'd staple these cardboards and roll the sheet and blanket right around. And of course, every other bunk had the thing folded one way and every other had it at the other end - the head or the foot. And they would put strings down and make these things perfect so when the Colonel came in for inspection there wouldn't be anything out of the way. It was too much, I think, everything had to be immaculate. The Colonel would come in and hit your Barracks bag with a stick "any dirty shoes in there?" NO SIR! You know, unshined shoes. Everything is supposed to be shined and out there. You had your footlocker right in front of your bunk and you had everything on display. Under your footlocker was sort of like a rack where you had your shoes lined up. And on the side was a little "ditty box" where you kept your shoe polish and the polish for your brass and all those things. Every Friday we used to air out our mattresses. You have a photograph over here that was made on a Friday.

TH: Yes, that's right.

AZ: That's the day they got the air.

TH: That's the photograph made by Mike Lakomie showing the men early in the morning right out in front of the building..

AZ: That was right out in front of our Barracks, Building 74, right.

TH: And you pointed this out to me right up on the second floor of the Barracks you can see all the white sheets hanging over the banister there. That's where most of the men slept in Building 74, upstairs. They had a large squad room there and then they had a smaller squadron where the bugler slept and several other men, and they several other rooms where Noncoms slept, including the First Sergeants room.

TH: I often wondered where did the Buglers practice.

AZ: You know all these building that were supposed to be Mess Halls, they weren't all Mess Halls. Some of them were changed into something else. The last one down near Building 74 was where the band practiced, that included the Buglers. And those horns blew there all the time. Then of course in the squad room where my friend Vic slept for awhile, he was surrounded by Buglers and he learned to blow a bugle. He had his own mouthpiece and he used to blow the bugle just for the fun of it. He wound up in Iceland during the War and he became Bugler. (LOL) When there was a fire here every Bugler on the Post sounded Fire Call. The Bugler in the Guard House, who was the Bugler of the Guard, sounded all calls for twenty four hours. He would run out to the megaphone down by the flag pole and sound all the calls. If there was a fire he would run out there and sound Fire Call and all the other Buglers picked this up, every Bugler was required to do this no matter what time of day or night it was, he would go down on the porch of the Barracks and sound Fire Call because we always responded to Fire Calls including when the Officers' Club burned one time. We were dressed to go to an Army Day parade….

TH: On April 9, 1938 the Officer's Club caught fire would you tell us about that?

AZ: Well, that was the day we were supposed to go on the *ORD*, the *General E.O.C. ORD*, the Mine Planter, we were supposed to be taken to New York to march in the Army Day parade and we heard Fire Call and the gun goes off. See, they went out there and fired the gun.

TH: What kind of a gun was that, Al?

AZ: I think it was a French .75. They had several. This had metal rims. Later on they had rubber tires.

TH: Yeah, but the old fashioned ones had the metal rims.

AZ: I have a picture of them somewhere. So the gun went off and the Fire Call and we all thought we weren't going to go to the fire, we were all dressed to go to the parade. We had to run to the fire. I wound up on a detail carrying furniture out of the Officers Club, including a piano. And it was pouring in there because they had firemen in there from Highlands, our own Fire Department, they were just pouring water on that building. We were on the first floor, we never got to the second floor, and we were carrying out anything we could possible rescue. We were drenched.

TH: Where were you when you heard the call?

AZ: In the Barracks, in Building 74, getting ready to march down to the boat, the dock.

TH: Which way did you go?

AZ: We ran behind the barracks, between the Barracks and the Mess Hall. Some people pulled a hose cart and some men had to carry fire extinguishers and this was all double-time, you run to the fire. So we went there and they had a lot of firemen there and we wound up carrying furniture.

TH: Where was the fire?

AZ: I don't know what part of the building it started in but…the whole building had a lot of smoke coming out of it, a lot of flames coming out many of the windows.

TH: Upper levels?

AZ: Upper levels, right. Downstairs I didn't see any fire because it was wet down there. The water was maybe, two inches deep on the floors while we were carrying furniture out.

TH: This is interesting because I had never given it a thought what was in the Officers' Club. Do you now, remember some of the furnishings that were in there?

AZ: I was only in there twice. There was a lot of furniture we were carrying out. The piano, I remember, because it was very large and took a number of us to carry it out. I was there another time, in that large room where we have the affairs now…

TH: The Reunions? You mean where we have the dinners?

AZ: The dinners. I was there with a lot of other men to wash down the walls. We were enlisted men. We didn't hang out in the Officers Club unless for certain details. I was only there twice so I don't recall all the furnishing but I do know it was a palatial looking place to me. It was beautiful compared to what I had seen up to that time, you know, eighteen years of my life.

TH:: What did you see? What do you remember as to the layout?

AZ: It was beautiful wall paper on the walls that we washed. Very beautiful wall paper, life a buff color wall paper. Of course the floors were highly polished. When I was there the second time they were wet from the water but they were always highly polished. A very immaculate place.

So when we were dismissed from the fire, we marched right down to the boat. I thought we were going to go back and change into a clean uniform, a dry uniform - but right on the boat - because there was no time. This parade was scheduled to go on so right on the boat we went and we stood there for two hours and we had mess kits and they fed us beans on the boat. One guy dropped his mess kit in the water, it slipped, from an upper deck. I saw it go sailing by, beans and all into the water, New York Harbor. (LOL) So we went up to, I think, 102nd Street on the East River. I'm not quite sure 101st – 102nd but it was way up there. We got off the boat and we had New York City policemen on horseback escorting us to 5th Avenue – the parade. Some kids were playing with a baseball and one fell on a police officers head, and they didn't wear helmets then. I felt so sorry for him, he got off his horse, he was like stunned, you know. Anyway, about three policemen escorted us over to 5th Avenue. We marched down 5th Avenue to about 62nd Street. The reviewing stand was on the westerly side of 5th Avenue by Central Park. We passed the reviewing stand and turned left into 62nd and down to the East River and there was that Mine Planter waiting for us. Picked us up and took us back. But we dried out. We didn't get dirty, really, just wet.

TH: Yeah, all that work you had, that physical labor. How long were you involved with that during the day? An hour or two, helping to get the furniture out and stuff like that?

AZ: I'd say a little under an hour. Not very long.

TH: I must ask you, the portrait in the main hall in the Officers Club of General Hancock….

AZ: I don't know if it was there.

TH: I don't recall, okay.

AZ: Cause the one time I was there under pressure and the other time it was just washing walls.

TH: Sure, sure.

AZ: I don't think I got into that part where that portrait is.

TH: What did the Officers do there? When we say Officers' Club, to your knowledge, was it a place to relax for them or get fed?

AZ: I think most of it was just like dining out and having a few drinks and dances, parties. They had like these – usually a dance on a Saturday night.

TH: Socials…

AZ: Yeah, socials, that's right. I don't think too many Officers left the Post. They made much more money than we did but still it wasn't a lot of money.

TH: Yeah, so they stayed home.

AZ: I think they did that and I think most of that was cultivating friendships with the higher echelon and what not.

TH: (Laughter)

AZ: I have other words for that.

TH: I know what you mean.

AZ: I think that's what it was about, mostly. We had a Battery Commander, I better not name him, and he wound up in a fight in the Officers Club. The next day he came in to lead us on to drill with a broken arm in a sling. This guy was an Indian. Firewater got to him.

TH: Really, he was an Indian?

AZ: American Indian.

TH: And this was an Officer?

AZ: I understand – this might be an old rumor – that's why I don't want to mention names. I understand that this Second Lieutenant was involved with this Captain's daughter. This Captain was my Battery Commander. They got into some kind of squabble at the Officers' Club and the Captain hit the Lieutenant and broke his arm,

broke his own arm hitting this Lieutenant. But I liked this Captain, I don't want to say anything bad about him. He was strictly GI, demanded discipline, and I think that's the right way to do it in the Army. I don't go for laxity. He was strict, but he was smart, knew his stuff. We were down in Delaware on maneuvers and he was sighting up on the gun, sighting the gun and one of the Second Lieutenant Reserve Officers said "hey, Captain, do you see any Indians out there?" (LOL) He was shading his eyes from the sun and the Captain didn't appreciate that too much. (LOL) He didn't say a word, though. But he helped us with the guns. Pushing, these guns are very heavy. We had a lot of work to do to get them into firing position. The 12 inch railway mortars that we took down to Delaware. I looked and saw a pair of pink slacks next to me. Everyone was wearing fatigues. This Captain was up there pushing on this stuff too. That never happened. No Officer ever did that, to my knowledge.

TH: Also I must ask you, to get back to the Officers' Club, the second and third floor levels because I lived there for a year and a half - I'm living, now, on Sergeants' Row, I just moved in. All these single rooms up there, were they for unmarried Officers, to your knowledge or guest Officers?

AZ: No, one time you mentioned, someone asked you about the compliment of Officers and you said something like eighteen Officers. They had eighteen Officers' Quarters. I thought about this many times and I think that some Officers lived there at the Officers' Club, single Officers. Of course they had bachelors Officers quarters here too. But they couldn't house all of them there. In the summer we had a lot of Reserve Officers here. I would say those are the ones that lived at the Officers' Club. I'm guessing this. But I think that that's fairly accurate to assume that. Because we had permanent Officers. Most of them were permanent Officers here, you know, like Regular Army, they weren't Reserve. They lived right here in the Bachelors Officers Quarters. The married ones lived in the large houses there on Officers Row. And there were others that had to be living in the Officers' Club because they couldn't be in the Sergeants quarters. Or on the (?) ranch where some of the Sergeants lived was like a tenement – a big tenement. Its not there anymore.

TH: Did any big personalities come and visit while you were here?

AZ: We had a number of people. Lindbergh came here, Charles Lindbergh, Colonel Lindbergh. I saw him, I was up in the Battery Commander's tower on the telephone. We used to rotate different positions you know, different jobs on the guns. That day I was up in the BC tower and I looked down and saw this civilian man down there. He looked familiar but I didn't know who he was I couldn't place him. I heard Phillip Kaplan, another guy who was the water boy for that day said" does the Colonel wish a drink of water?" And it hit me like a ton of bricks - that was Lindbergh, Colonel Lindbergh. He refused the water. I don't blame him everyone was drinking out of that same ladle. And they had Eddie Rickenbacker came one time. We had a parade out here for him. Some movie actress. General Drum came down several times. He was a Lieutenant General, three star General. Before him General McCoy came down. He was Second Corps area Commander, Major General McCoy. Then when Drum became Lieutenant General, they

formed four Armies. And he was the Commanding General of the Second Corps Area and the Commander of the First Army. That's how he rated three stars. They created four Lieutenant Generals then in 1939. We didn't have any for a long time. In '39, they created four.

TH: Yeah. Now the Second Corps area contained what, now?

AZ: The Second Corps area was New York State, New Jersey, and I'd say part of Pennsylvania. I'll give you a fast run down of the Corps areas like approximate boundaries. Like the New England states was the First Corps Area. Later they changed these Corps areas to Service Commands – they called them Service Commands during the War. But the New England States, then we had the Middle Atlantic States as the Second, Delaware and Maryland was the Third Corps Area. Below that like Georgia and North and South Carolina would be fourth. Around Detroit might be fifth. Chicago might be sixth. South around New Orleans would be seventh. Texas would be eighth, I was there in that Service Command. Through that area is eighth. North of Texas also into Colorado into Kansas. The west coast was the Ninth Corps area. This is sort of a sloppy set up but I don't have the exact boundaries. The second was right here New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. And of course, he had a duel role, he was also Commander of the First Army, General Drum.

And then the King and Queen came here in 1939, June 10th. I remember that day and I just checked on my paper work. I had a letter of Commendation from General Drum and it was talked about the June 10, 1939 visit by the King and Queen. I know I'm accurate on the date. They landed in Red Bank and C Battery had the detail of the the Guard of Honor detail here. E Battery went to Red Bank. We didn't go to Red Bank we were on the pier here. They landed and came by train to Red Bank. E Battery was out there and they furnished the Guard of Honor. Many men from Headquarters were strung along the road here facing the water on both sides, the Bay or the Ocean. They never saw the King and Queen, they weren't allowed to look. They were supposed to look out there. This peninsula was surrounded by Coast Guard and Naval vessels. At the Main Gate, which was a little bit past the ….

TH: … our present Main Gate, the south end of Sandy Hook….

AZ; The 16th Infantry came down from Fort Jay with machine guns and they had machine guns posted there. We were quarantined here for seventy-two hours. No one could leave or come in. We searched every place that you could possible hide on this Post. Brush, cellars, where you people finally found some ammunition. We tramped all over that area 'cause we hit everything. For three days we searched around to make sure that there was no one here who didn't belong here. And the place was ringed with Naval ships and Coast Guard all around. I never saw something like that in my life. When they got here into Red Bank, they got into cars and drove into Fort Hancock. Drove through leisurely down in front of Officers' Row, to the docks, and they got on the *WARRINGTON*, the Destroyer and they went up to the Battery. From there they went up

to the World's Fair and the next day I think they had hot dogs at Roosevelt's estate in Hyde Park. They just came through here. They just stood on the pier for a little while.

TH: Where were you on that day?

AZ: We were, C Battery, was on the pier.

TH: Right out here on the Fort Hancock wharf.

AZ: I can't place exactly where it was now because it's changed around.

TH: They've taken it down. The Coast Guard took out the wharf.

AZ: They got out of the vehicles there and got on the ship. The Coast Guard Cutter Campbell was out there also and fired a 21 gun salute. These guns here fired a 21 gun salute. Some members from Headquarters did it, I don't know who right out here in front of Headquarters.

TH: Did they have the whole road from Red Bank out to Sandy Hook lined?

AZ: Well I don't know outside of the Post.

TH: But from the South end up to the wharf.

AZ: Each man could see the next man. I think they called that Cossack duty. They all faced away from the street there guarding the roadway. And the King and Queen went by behind them. There were other people too that came along during that trip. We have a picture showing Governor Moore and I think the Prime Minister of Canada or something. They had the State Troopers. There were others that came here too.

TH: To your knowledge, that day, do you know if the King and Queen stopped at the Halyburton Monument?

AZ: They didn't stop there, from what I've been told. All the guys set up the Monument and all, and they didn't stop there. All the guys that were there said this. I wasn't there, but from what I understand from all the men that were posted around that area, they never stopped. They drove by, slowly probably, but they didn't stop.

TH: Just prior to the King and Queen coming, were the soldiers thinking that they would probably stop?

AZ: They were set. They got that plaque up there and everything, they were getting ready for that. They knew they were coming. They were all charged up and they were ready because that Monument was made maybe a couple of years before that.

TH: It was made by Mike Lakomie in 1937 and they got the plaque ready that's why it reads "erected and dedicated June 1939'". But that's deceiving. The plaque was made just prior to June 1939. They just put the whole thing on there just to say that. But it was actually built by Mike Lakomie, Company 288, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp, Sandy Hook in the summer of 1937. So it was probably a little disappointing that they go riding by.

AZ: Like I said, I wasn't there but a lot of the other fellas were posted near there and they said they didn't stop at all, just went by. Maybe it was pointed out to them.

EH: We'd like you to describe a typical day as you remember it. And you were remarking that winters and summers varied so much, it would probably be very helpful if you could give us the comparisons for our records.

AZ: Well, in the summertime we were very busy firing the various guns that were assigned to C Battery. There was not much time for fatigue such as cutting grass or chopping wood, shoveling coal, delivering coal, which we did in the winter time. Most of the time was spent preparing guns for firing, getting them in position, firing the guns, cleaning them after they were fired and painting them, varnishing over the paint.

EH: What are the colors?

AZ: The color of the guns was olive drab just like a greenish/brown that most people know it as. And this was peace time so we used to shine the guns by putting on varnish over the paint. And we also did that with the ammunition cars and the gun cars. So that took up most of our time during the summer. There was a lot of work involved in the Coast Artillery because the guns were so large and required a lot of maintenance. Plus we also fired the disappearing guns. For instance, like Battery Granger, we fired those guns many times for West Point Cadets, Delaware National Guard or Reserve Officers – CMTC's – I think it's called Citizens Military Training Corps.

EH: Civilian Military Training Corps.

AZ: Yeah. They all used to come down there and watch us. So we were quite busy during the summer. We did not get what they call leaves, nowadays, in those days they were called furloughs. We did not get those in the summer. Of course lots of times we had to Parade/Retreat, like say five o'clock, we'd come back from the guns and get cleaned up and go out and have some kind of a Retreat/Parade sometimes on a Saturday. We usually didn't work on the guns on a Saturday afternoon or Sundays. Almost never, unless some emergency arose. We worked cleaning ammunition in these magazines they had under the disappearing guns, paint the shells different colors. If it was a high explosive shell it was painted yellow. Another shell was painted gray – I don't recall what that was for.

EH: So it was color coded. According to the danger involved, was that it?

AZ: By the color of the shell you knew what kind of shell it was. Well, a high explosive shell had an explosive in it. Most other shells did not. Some shells had gas in them. I think that was gray, I'm not sure. I think the gas shell was painted gray. I'm not absolutely certain of that. But we did have gray shells. See, a shell with an explosive charge in it, was yellow. But there were other shells that didn't have an explosive.

**End of CD 1 of 2**

EH: Can you review for us your discussion of the twelve inch Railroad mortars having sand to give it the weight- you mentioned the weight, briefly? and the components.

AZ: Well the shell, the projectile is supposed to weigh 1046 pounds. They determined the propelling charge when you know the weight of the shell. So rather than put powder, an explosive charge into the shell, they would fill it with sand and weigh it, so it should weigh the pounds that it should weigh with the powder. And that was called semi-fixed ammunition. You had the projectile, the propelling charge – powder in the bag which was made of silk – and the primer. The primer was used to ignite the propelling charge. So there was three components. And the shell itself had a blunt tip, rather than a pointed tip. That was used so that it wouldn't glance off of a deck. If it hit at an angle it would penetrate a deck – say a battleship. At a time of war rather than have the sand in the projectile, they would put in an explosive charge. And after it made contact with a deck, it would explode after it penetrated the deck. Of course that was on the twelve inch Railway mortar. We fired other guns also. We fired guns at Battery Granger. Those were disappearing guns. I don't remember the diameter but I think they were ten inch, I'm not sure. You people can check that out. And we fired two anti-aircraft guns that were located between the Visitor Center and the Ocean – the present Visitor Center. We have some concrete foundations there where the guns were in place. They were permanently incased there – three inch anti-aircraft – we fired those. We fired guns at Battery Peck, Battery Gunnison, this was in addition to our regular twelve inch mortars. Of course we had our sister Battery, E Battery that had the eight inch railway guns assigned to their Battery. They also fired other guns in addition to their eight inch guns. They fired the guns at Batteries Kingman and Mills. And of course, the 7th Coast Artillery, Headquarters Battery, the only Battery of the 7th here at the time, that was the Mine Planting Battery. They went out on these boats like the *L-40* and the *General ORD* and planted their mines in the Bay for practice. So all Batteries were very busy during the summer, all the line Batteries. In the fall we would have to prepare the guns for winter storage. We'd have to clean them down, scrape off rust, touch up paint, put the muzzle cover on, breech cover, put Cosmoline on all the metal parts that weren't painted. And you put them away for the winter. Of course in the spring you had all this work to un-do. You had to clean off everything. Of course when you put your guns away in the fall you started doing your other chores like I mentioned earlier, chopping wood, you had to do a lot of maintenance. You had to do a lot of your own work. The Army was very poor then. The Government didn't spend money on civilian employees. Just before it got too cold we would paint the interior of the barracks, ceilings, walls, everything. We didn't do the outside. We never worked on the outside of the barracks. They have some civilian employees that would do that. Exterior work we didn't do. Like sweep up or

something like that but not painting of woodwork on the outside or putting on roofs or anything like that. And I remember when I was in Building 74 around 1938 some people came in to put in a new floor – to put flooring over the old flooring while I was there. These were civilian employees. All the painting inside was done by the soldiers themselves. Of course, we had to supply the Officers and the Non-Commissioned Officers with their fuel, which was coal and wood. They had a coal yard here and they used to send details out to the coal yard.

EH: Do you know where that was located?

AZ: Back here where these garages are. There's like an indentation in the ground, like a dimple.

EH: There is still a path of coal parallel to the street running from the sixteen car garage straight over to the Lighthouse. It's still obviously on the ground there.

AZ: They had like these sections. They had different kinds of coal. Like peat coal or buck coal or whatever they call it. They were all separated and they had a man there that was in charge of that coal yard. And they would send some of us down there to work for him. And he would have a truck that he got from the Quartermaster and we would deliver the coal to the various Officers quarters and Non-Commissioned Officers quarters. And occasionally we would be chopping wood there, sawing wood that was obtained from demolished buildings. This was really scrap lumber it wasn't like logs or anything like that. And in the spring – before I get to the spring I better stay with the winter. We used to do a lot of close order drill on the field there, drilling, parades in the afternoon, like Retreat parades. No matter what kind of work we did during the day we had to get cleaned up for a parade in the afternoon –unless it was snowing or raining hard. We always drilled every morning, at least forty five minutes. They used to call it Infantry Drill. This was when we were not at the guns. This was close order drill out here on the Parade Ground. We went on hikes in the area. Not too far we couldn't hike down to the Gate. And we used to study for Gunner tests. They had Second Class Gunner, First Class Gunner, and Expert Gunner. When you first started out you studied for Second Class Gunner. You had to know the nomenclature on the guns, how they worked and what not. And it was more advanced each time and this was in the winter time. You had more time. When the weather was bad, someone would be instructing you, some Officer, usually. They had something called "cordage", you had to learn how to make knots like they do in the Navy. Coast Artillery did that also. Many different things you were required to learn during the winter months. If you studied hard enough and were intelligent enough, you became an Expert Gunner. And that paid five dollars a month extra for a year. I was one of the unfortunate one when I became an Expert Gunner, after collecting thirty dollars for six months, the money ran out. So the seventh month I got $1.40 and that was the end. And I couldn't get it ever, you know, I just couldn't get it. Some people who became Expert Gunner earlier, who came in the Army before I did, managed to collect their full $60. Five dollars a month for twelve months. That meant a lot. When I was an Expert Gunner I was also a Private First Class. Title was Railway Sergeant. If it was war time I would have been a Sergeant but they weren't

throwing out the rank. I was qualified for the job. I was a Railway Sergeant, Expert Gunner. Some people were Gun Commanders that's what they took. We studied a lot. My job, Railway Sergeant, was the make up of a train, how to build a track, a switch, a spur. And tracing the air from the air brake system from atmospheric pressure to atmospheric pressure, where the air goes, what it does. It was interesting. I liked it. So I became sort of a "big shot" I was making $34.75 a month for awhile. Private First Class and the extra five dollars for the Expert Gunner. Of course it should have been $35, but a quarter of it went to the Old Soldiers Home.

EH: Is that still in operation? Is there still such a thing?

AZ: Yes. The Old Soldiers home is right off of Michigan Avenue and North Capitol Street in Washington, DC. It's across North Capitol Street from the Catholic University and the shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Catholic Church there. The Pope visited and President Johnson's one daughter was married there. It's within walking distance of the Old Soldiers Home. My wife and I visited that place once. And after seeing the place I decided they could keep all those quarters they took from me. They didn't take them from the selectees, they just took them from the Regular Army men. Selective Service didn't put any money into this. And, you know, it's just a place to wait for the "inevitable". A very nice place, though, very well kept. One fella worked there he was an inmate there. I shouldn't say inmate, he was a member there. He was a retired man and he asked us to come in. This doesn't have anything to do with Fort Hancock, its Old Soldiers. He asked us to come into this building where we could have a beer. That building was the Anderson Cottage where Abraham Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation and it was his summer White House, six miles from the White House. It was out in the country then. The Old Soldiers home was there then and it's there now. I had a glass of beer in that place and it was very interesting.

EH: How many men were beneath you as Railway Sergeant?

AZ: Really, none. I had the title but I didn't have the stripes. The Army was so cheap you didn't have much rank in the service then. You had like, Privates First Class would be in charge of quarters then. Usually a Corporal or Sergeant was supposed to do that, not a Private First Class or a Private. Private First Class was kinda like a big shot. Sometimes he was acting Corporal or something. Later on during the war, stripes were floating around all over the place. It was entirely different in peacetime. They had nothing in these line Batteries between Buck Sergeant, three stripes, and First Sergeant. No Staff or Tech. That was in Headquarters, that's all, not in line Batteries. You became a Sergeant, you're gonna die as a Sergeant unless you're lucky enough some day to become a First Sergeant. A First Sergeant, at that time, wore five chevrons, not six. A Master Sergeant outranked him. Later on they equaled it, they made it even. They gave the First Sergeant another stripe but he had a diamond in the middle between the upper chevrons and the lower chevrons. And the Master Sergeant had a blank blue area to show that he was a Sergeant Major or a Master Sergeant something else but they didn't have those in line Batteries. Highest you could go was Buck Sergeant unless you were lucky enough and they needed a First Sergeant. So it was Privates, Privates First Class, a

few Corporals, a few Sergeants and one First Sergeant. And I went through, I think, three First Sergeants in my outfit. And one left just before I came into the outfit. His name was Razga, Sergeant Razga. He was a pallbearer for the Unknown Soldier after World War 1. He was First Sergeant of C Battery but he retired just before I came into the Battery. His son in law was an MP here his name was Adams, Sparky Adams.
I'm bouncing around I really don't know where to hit it. I was supposed to tell you about the day, what the day was like.

EH: Yeah, you told me about the winter setting.

AZ: Winter was a lot of work and studying. Outdoor work and detail work and the painting of Barracks. We didn't always paint the barracks but sometimes it took several weeks. You know, part time work because you had to go out there and drill every day unless it was snowing. And of course you had your Guard to perform. Every ten days or two weeks you'd come on Guard. They'd call it Guard Duty but we just said Guard, you went on Guard. During the War they got fancy and they called it going on "Guard Duty". Like I was in the "Service" not like I was in the "Army". You say service and then you have to ask the fella "which branch?" This way you say Army or Navy and everybody knows.

EH: So the Guard was performed every ten days?

AZ: It all depends on how many men you had in the outfit at the time. See, if several of them were on furlough, you'd go on guard every ten days or so. If most of them were back from furlough maybe it would stretch out to two weeks. And Kitchen Police, also, KP. It wasn't like punishment, it was part of your duties you had to perform those duties.

EH: What was that like?

AZ: That was a nightmare. (LOL) I was telling someone at work the other day, it was crazy. Here, I don't know how it was elsewhere, but here in Fort Hancock, the person the earliest to report became the Dining Room Orderly. He would be in charge of issuing stuff from the Dining Room, bringing trays of food and things like that. He didn't have to wash dishes. He just cleaned off the tables in the Dining Room when the men left and take all the empty trays back to the Kitchen and the KP's did all the work. The Dining Room Orderly was picked by the Cook. The Cook would get up early to get the fires going and what not. And the first guy there would be Dining Room Orderly and everybody wanted to be the Dining Room Orderly so all of us used to report in real early, maybe four o'clock, you know, maybe you didn't have to come in till six. But everybody tried to beat the other guys. You know, you wanna be first. Once in awhile I was first and lots of times I wasn't first. If you were on KP your first job would be to bring out the food into the Dining Room. Everybody rushed out there all the Kitchen Police. And then when the men ate, you'd have to wash the dishes and pots and pans. And these cooks, looked like they were doing it on purpose they'd get these pots dirty maybe throw something in one pan and say "here, wash this", you know, like they had a grudge against you. It seemed that way when you were on KP. So you had to wash all these dishes like

for 180/200 men. That's a lot of dishes and silverware. And we had these mattress covers – we used to get this hot silverware taken out of the hot water – and throw the silverware into the mattress cover. One man would get in on the other end – not onto the mattress cover, not into it – one man would hold it at one end and I would hold it at the other end and we would roll that cover and shake it and the silverware would dry out. It was hot, you see, and this mattress cover used to absorb some of the moisture. They'd dry out and it was nice, it was easy, it was a smart job. And then you washed the floor down completely, washed the floor. The floor was wiped you could eat off of that floor, after breakfast. And then you peeled potatoes or whatever, all kinds of different jobs, till lunchtime. Then you had to put the food out there again. You ate early chow, so you would be ready at 12 o'clock to feed the other men. You took the food out, you washed all the dishes again and you went down the basement and did more potato peeling for supper or something you know. Or moving boxes of canned goods around, whatever. Suppertime was the same routine, you bring the food out, wash the dishes and scrub the floor down again.

EH: Twice a day?

AZ: Not lunchtime, but in the morning after breakfast and in the evening, scrubbed it down. We had a very strict Sergeant, Mess Sergeant, if he found any speck of anything anywhere that was it. I can give you one example of what happened to me on KP one time. We had fried eggs and I was washing the dishes. He came along and picked up a couple of the plates and he found a little speck of yellow on one of the plates. That was a dried egg that I didn't get off too well. He made me do all the dishes over. Maybe a couple of hundred plates I had to do over. I'm not gonna argue with him, he was a Sergeant, right?

EH: Oh my goodness.

AZ: So I did 'em over. I never had a dirty plate leave my hands again. (LOL) You know I liked him. He was strict, but I liked him. He was from (?). His name was Morris Sandleburn. He later became a First Sergeant. There was an Irish Sergeant there by the name of Flaherty, I mentioned him before. We used to call him Sergeant Murphy. They told me one day to report to Sergeant Murphy when I was a Recruit. So I went in there and said, 'are you Sergeant Murphy?" He looked and me and said "Yeah". His name wasn't Murphy at all. He figured as a Recruit I wouldn't know. It was funny, but he was a very strict man.

EH: What were the times that these three meals were held at?

AZ: Breakfast was at seven. Noontime we had lunch. And right after Retreat, which was a few minutes after 5 o'clock, we would have supper. Usually we had a Retreat Parade almost every day. Retreat was sounded at 5 o'clock. Maybe ten minutes after that, fifteen minutes after that we were in the Mess Hall. And we always went to eat, dressed. Not in fatigues, in your dress uniform. We never ate in the Mess Hall in fatigues. The only ones allowed to wear fatigues in there, were the KP's. You came in

off of a detail at 11:30. 11:30 was recall. That's when you came off of a detail for lunch. You washed up and you changed clothes. In those days we wore boots and breeches. The boots were laced up to here. And you went down in the Mess Hall and you ate. This was good, everybody was clean. Then you went back up and did little chores around whatever you had to do for yourself, shine shoes or something. Then one o'clock back in fatigues and out to detail. In the morning when you did close order drill you wore your uniform, you didn't wear fatigues. You wore a regular uniform. You never marched in fatigues for drill. You went to the guns in fatigues all the time. Only one group didn't wear fatigues was the Range section. They were in this railroad car and they had all this equipment and they used to compute where the target was sending the data up to the guns so that we would know how to aim the guns. That was their job and they telephoned the information to us every thirty seconds. We had one fella that would get the azimuth reading and another fella would get the elevation reading. The people on the guns would read this off the board and set the guns up. They wore uniforms because they had a nice clean job and the fellas on the guns wore fatigues. But in the Mess Hall, everyone dressed up. And the Corporals and the Sergeants sat separate from the men.

EH: Ah, ha, the ranks.

AZ: Right, they had the Noncoms table. They had usually one Corporal at each table to sort of have discipline. He sat at the end of the table. He was in charge of that table. Of course all the other Noncoms sat in their own group, you know, Corporals and Sergeants. Later on during the War I saw all kinds of people mixed together. It really didn't matter much. They were very strict on the stuff during Peace time.

EH: How often did you have to perform KP?

AZ: That was about the same as the Guard, maybe ten days, twelve days, couple of weeks. And once in awhile you'd get stuck on a Sunday. A lot of the men were off or on Guard on a Sunday. That was the sad part, you had to perform these duties on Sunday. It panned out that way some days. If it was on a Wednesday or Thursday, so what you'd have to be doing something else anyway. After Inspection on Saturday and there was nothing urgent, you could be off till Monday morning. Most of the time we hung around the Barracks because we didn't have money to go anywhere or if you had no plans to visit anyone or anything like that, you could hang around.

EH: Wasn't the theater active?

AZ: Oh, the theater was active, you're right. It was a nice new theater. It looked new, I don't know how new it was. I used to go a couple of times a week. I think it was fifteen cents. War Department theater and the Officers had a reserved spot there too. Two rows and no one could crash there it said Officers Only and you stayed clear.

EH: Was it the first two rows?

AZ: No. It was in an ideal spot in the center. Not too close to the screen and not too far from the screen. Some Officer is gonna hear this and think "this guy is sour grapes". I'm just telling what it was, that's all. Its not sour grapes at all. They used to come in there in their dress blues at night, capes and everything, like they were going some place. I remember this Major Henessey came in. You know Artillery has that scarlet, we called it red, with that cape out there all red showing, beautiful blue and the scarlet along here because it was the Coast Artillery. They came dresses up, looked sharp.

EH: How often were the movies changed? Was it frequent?

AZ: Quite often. I'd say maybe twice a week. I'm not positive but I'd say twice a week because I used to go a couple of times a week. I wouldn't go to see the same picture.

EH: Was it on every day?

AZ: Every night. Every evening I think around seven o'clock. There was a Sergeant that used to run that place by the name of Connor. I met his widow at the last Reunion, First Sergeant by the name of Connor. Claude, I think his first name was.

EH: That's right. She donated some silverware to the Museum, Mrs. Claude Connor. And she's in Indiana, I think.

AZ: Oh yeah, I met her here, I think it was at the Reunion.

EH: So he was in charge of the movies, or of the theater?

AZ: He ran that theater. That was in addition to his regular duties. You know, these people used to get side jobs to make extra money. Like they had these men that they called "dog robbers". They were like strikers for the Officers. Five bucks a month they would get, extra. They used to baby sit, take care of the furnaces… Of course they had coal furnaces, you had to tend to these furnaces and these fellas did that. They'd have to get up during the late evening and go out to the Officer's house and bank the fire, or whatever they had to do. And they had to get out there early in the morning before Reveille and get it going again. For five dollars a month, from the Officer, that was from the Officer, not from the Government. Also, a lot of these Officers had maids, civilian girls that used to live there. One fella married one of those maids. And I brought here baby back from Fort Jay in my old beat up car in 1939 and she was ten days old this little girl. So that girl is now forty one years old.

EH: (LOL) That's remarkable.

AZ: This man was in my barracks and he was a striker for this Officer and he met this maid there and he married her and they had this baby. I bought this old beat up car, I never should have bought a car. He said, "I'll buy you gas, how about going up to Fort Jay to pick up my wife and baby" on such and such a day they were going to be discharged from the hospital. They were there ten days. So I drove up there with him

and my car smoked something awful, it was burning oil. Real junk. We went on the ferry to Governors Island got his wife and the baby and she sat in the back with the baby. I was so worried about this little baby. So I'm driving through the Holland Tunnel and the car is smoking and the windows were open. I was hoping this baby wasn't asphyxiated by smoke. I drove them to Asbury Park. They got an apartment over there in Asbury. This guys name was Wood or Woods. He was from Trenton, originally. Woody, they called him.

EH: The maids, though, were they all local girls?

AZ: I would say the local towns. A lot of those soldiers married girls from around here.

EH: And they lived on the third floor of the Officers houses? The maids?

AZ: They lived in the house, I don't know where. There's something I can tell you later but I don't think I should put it on tape. (LOL)

EH: LOL

AZ: One Officer's maid didn't live on the third floor she lived on the first floor I found out from some guy. That was Captain Groves maid. You know that Captain Grove. He's probably long gone. I don't know what else maybe you can give me a hint as to what else you'd like to hear.

EH: In following up with the preparation of the guns, in spring time where you would remove all the Cosmoline….

AZ: Spring time we got everything shaped up, you cleaned everything out. We removed all the Cosmoline. We used a product called Varsol. We had this wool waste. We used to use this waste for a lot of things. We used to wipe the guns down clean off all the Cosmo line. Then we'd take the locomotive to move us out from the gun park to the firing position, where we used to fire these guns. We had a spur there and it runs out onto the spur. We had the gun itself on the gun car then you had an ammunition car and a tool car for each gun. Two box cars then the gun. The gun was placed on a steel flat car, it was all steel. And it was a lot of work getting these guns in position. We took them out there and they had to be jacked up off the tracks. Then we had to build up a platform for these guns all kinds of planking and metal bars and things.

EH: What is the weight you're talking of now?

AZ: One hundred seventy six thousand pounds is what the gun weighed, eighty five tons. And then the gun carriage, I don't know what the gun carriage weighed but the gun weighed eight five tons, 176,000 pounds, something like that. That was the twelve inch railway mortar. As a matter of fact, I'd like to mention that was the only mortar with rifling in the bore. With lines and grooves in the bore. All mortars are smooth bore except for that particular gun. That was not a smooth bore gun. That was a gun that fired

a projectile and this projectile rotated because of the lines and grooves. You had two parts on the projectile that touched the bore. That was the up front they called the buralay and the back had a copper rotating band. Sometimes those rotating bands flew off. It would make a lot of noise when it flew off. That rotating band was there so that the lines and grooves would dig into it and spin that shell around send it out so that it wouldn't tumble in flight. They were so large that you could see them go all the way up until they were ready to drop. There was a Sergeant name Sandwal (?) who took some beautiful pictures of those guns being fired. I understand that he's still alive and I told Tom I'd be happy to make prints from his negatives because they're all the same size and good exposure. If you're making prints from all kinds of different negatives it's a nightmare. One of the Gooch boys was supposed to look into this but I don't know if he did. But his pictures would show a lot of what took place at Fort Hancock in the 30's.

EH: How were the guns jacked up? What was the…..

AZ: Very large jacks, by hand.

EH: Really?

AZ: Oh, everything was by hand. You really had to be in shape.

EH: So it was a special jack?

AZ: Special jacks. You had to put these logs down on the ties. We built railroad tracks too.

EH: So the logs were placed under the guns?

AZ: On the ties, in other words, the weight was spread out. You didn't want to disturb the rails or bend them. You know, when the guns went off they would damage the rails. They weren't touching rails anymore. They had outriggers big large metal things that went out from the guns like that and buried into large planks, like racks, they look like a rack with a little fixture on it where this outrigger fit. And that was put in real tight. And every time a gun went off a fella ran around – twenty eight men on a gun crew – and every time the gun went off, each guy had a certain job to perform. The man who was in charge of this outrigger detail would have to tighten up each outrigger in case it loosened. It had to be very snug you know, between the gun and this thing that it was leaning against. That was all sand behind this that was a really deep hole. This large wooden thing was put in this metal cup. This outrigger fit into it. It had like a round head to it, fit right into that and was attached to the gun here. You had two like this, two like that and in the back also, the other end of the gun.

EH: So you had six outriggers?

AZ: Eight. Then, this gun, never hit the rails when it went off. It had like a thirty-two inch recoil – it went back thirty two inches. It was very loud and everything flew in the

air when the gun went off. They said stand on your toes and keep your mouth open. And when the first round went off your fatigue hat flew off your head, (LOL) , dust and dirt in your mouth. It was interesting, though, fascinating.

EH: How often was this done?

AZ: Those guns were fired in May, usually, once a year. Twenty four rounds were fired, two guns, twelve rounds a piece. And the shells weighed 1,046 pounds. Of course, most guns were fired once a year. Some guns weren't fired at all when I was here but most of them were. Most of the big guns were fired at least once a year. By saying once, that's several rounds – several days. Granger was like, next in popularity, not popularity, in use, mostly used. Those two big Batteries down there Kingman and Mills, we never fired those, but E Battery did. They were good sized guns down there too. Then we had the .155's. We used to go down near the Main Gate, way down, and fire them right on the beach there just near the sea wall, .155 millimeter cans.

EH: Were they just temporarily placed there?

AZ: Yeah. They were kept up here someplace and you could wheel them around, pull them with tractors. They had two tractors here. Matter of fact I remember their name, Holt, the name of the tractor like Mack or White. They would pull these guns into position and we would swing out these long legs that they had. The gun was facing like this like a "V" and buried into the sand. The gun stayed there and when it recoiled, everything shook. Like everything kicked back, it was dug in well.

EH: Such power – astounding.

AZ: I forget what the range is for the .155, but it was quite a range. Ours were French. They had markings on them in French. We got them from France, I guess at the end of World War I. Guns are kept very clean and we used to use what they called Sal's soda and Castile soap. Castile soap is a very pure soap. Like you could use on a baby. You use that kind of soap to clean out the guns after they were fired.

EH: After the firing, was there a tremendous amount of work done just to clean them up again?

AZ: Yeah, a lot of work. The dirt got into everything. Plus all that copper from the rotating band and all that junk to coat the lines and grooves, you know, the bore of the gun had to be cleaned out. It shined like a mirror when you got done with it.

EH: Can you describe the process?

AZ: Well, we had a long rod a ram rod. This was a long wooden thing with a knob on the end of it. It took a team of men, a lot of men, as many as could get on this thing. You'd have the gun be pressed 5 degrees below zero. And you just ran in and out of that

thing back and forth to clean it out and all that stuff would run out this way from the muzzle.

EH: Did you have hoses, buckets, or what?

AZ: No hoses, we had buckets of stuff -solutions. Then you'd wipe it out with clean rags and stuff on this big knobby thing. It would be immaculate when you were done with it.

EH: Was this a full day's job?

AZ: It was several hours, several hours for each gun. Just that alone, cleaning the bore, the inside of the cannon. Of course you had other stuff on the outside. Dirt and sand got into everything. You know when that gun went off, that was it, it got filthy. The gun became very dirty all over and in between rounds they shoved a little ramrod thing in it to sort of half clean it and to die out the flames. Sometimes there was some flames left in it so you had to clean it before you put the next round in it because you don't want to explode that powder. And they would do this, clean it out quick to make sure no flames were there. Its sort of a superficial cleaning job not really a complete job just lubricate it a little bit and then they would lower the gun. It would be 5 degrees below zero, you lowered it by gravity. Just ram the shell home in shove the powder in, close the breech. Then a fella would hand a little primer to the man who handles that. He put the primer on and put the lanyard on – that's a rope, a lanyard, right – goes down to the ground. The lanyard is down there and they had five men up on the breech. Each man had his function to perform, you know. They had five men on the breech, one man on the azimuth, and one on the elevation - seven men up there on the gun. Twenty eight men all together each man had his job. Like some were in charge of putting out ammunition from the ammunition car. Others two men were on the ground. One was the azimuth data board operator the other was the elevation data board operator. They wrote the figures down that they got from the range section. They turned the blackboard around every thirty seconds so the men on the gun could read what this was and write these new figures down. With all this noise around you had to listen to all these numbers coming to you on the telephone from the range section. Then you had those men running around tightening up those outriggers. A lot of men, twenty eight, and each guy had a job. Certain jobs you had to do some men had two, three jobs, small ones. Some had bigger jobs, one job. Every minute a round went off so every thirty seconds you heard the gun go off because there were two guns. When one gun fired thirty seconds later – they had what they called time interval bells – thirty seconds later right on the nose, the gun commander of the second gun gave the command, then thirty seconds later that gun had to be ready to fire again. Every minute…

EH: For what duration?

AZ: Well it wasn't very long because you only had twelve rounds per gun. But you could do this for quite awhile.

EH: It must have been a deafening sound.

AZ: A very loud roar. The shorter the barrel the louder the roar. The long gun gives you a sharp crack. The 1-5-5's or that eight inch gun that E Battery had a longer barrel so they made a sharp crack. They had a smaller shell. They had like a fifteen mile range. Ours was eight and a half miles but it was a high trajectory. The shell went up and dropped. It could go over mountains or - it was meant for firing at ships so we had the high trajectory guns. But C Battery, and I think we had a little disadvantage over the other Batteries, because we were closer to the muzzle of the gun. It didn't extend out so far. We got a lot of flames and stuff, flareback and smoke and everything 'cause it was close by. The hair on your legs would get singed sometimes and things like that. If you were wearing fatigues they were like sticking up or something. E Battery the muzzle was further away. You had that there but it didn't travel back so much. It was a very exciting thing for young men. One fella, a friend of mine used to be a battery clerk. He wanted to go down to the guns all the time. He hated to be cooped up in the office. He like the guns, you know, exciting. Some guys were a little cowardly too. One big bruiser there just left, he disappeared. He said he went to the hospital. He said he thought he had appendicitis and the doctor examined him and he said you don't have appendicitis. He just ran off. He didn't ask to leave, he just ran off.

EH: Was there actual danger involved?

AZ: Yeah, there was danger.

EH: What was that like?

AZ: Well something could malfunction. Something could always happen. Somebody could make a mistake. Like I told you when we went to Delaware, same guns. Well we had four. Two we used here and two that were renovated, like, fixed up that we took down to Delaware.

EH: What size were these?

AZ: Twelve inch mortars. Well this gun was fastened down to the carriage by four large nuts and bolts. I would say the bolt was maybe, three inches in diameter. There were four of those and they held the gun down, two in the front and two in the back. Well they had to hold that gun down. When that gun recoiled it separated from the carriage. It would just fall back. So when we were down there in Delaware, both guns sheared off two of these bolts, the two front bolts were sheared off and they were noticed. Certain people had to watch for those things. Like I said earlier to Tom, if these guns were fired again, if this wasn't noticed and they were fired again, the whole thing would have came back. You know, two bolts would never hold that gun. It would have came back and killed everybody there. Heavy, eighty five tons. You wouldn't stand a chance. But I have to say these men were on the ball, they noticed this. I saw this stuff lying around. That wasn't my job. I saw these two big heavy things. Cause you see a lot of stuff. You see sand paper, hats off of guys heads, you know. These heavy objects, I saw them on

my gun, number 1 gun. It wasn't my job. Whoever was there reported it cause you watch for that every time. That person watches for that one thing, every time. Each person has a job. He reported it right away to the gun Commander who was on the ground and the Gun Commander reported to the Battery Commander who was up in the tower, Battery Commanders tower. Right away, because a minute later you had to fire another round. You better tell that man up there that you can't, something's wrong. So he says "sir number 1 gun out of order". The other gun went off, you know thirty seconds after this one and the same thing happened with that gun. They figure these things crystallize or something. They were steel. They were old some of those guns. And we had to wait for several days until somebody went up to Aberdeen to get new bolts. And now you're sweating it out. You had to put the new bolts in and you're wondering whets gonna happen now. But we did complete the firing and we picked up about fifteen hundred feet of track that we laid and put it back on cars and when we left the place it was immaculate like no one was ever there.

EH: When they were not used, were they stored in a particular building?

AZ: They were outside.

EH: They were never stored in a …

AZ: They were always outside. You know where those concrete emplacements are over there? Those big thick walls back here near the beach?

EH: Yes.

AZ: In that area, we had railroad tracks over there. That was the dump part, I think they called it. That's where all those guns were. That's where that shed was that I told you about. Where they were painting the roof? It was right near there. So those guns were kept there – mortars and C Batteries eight inch guns. Cause they were mobile guns, we could take them anywhere, anywhere there was track. Some of the other guns were permanently in their position, like Granger, behind the Visitor Center, over there.

EH: I was picturing some kind of a carport or some kind of a shelter.

AZ: No shelter, no shelter at all.

EH: What strikes me is the team work involved, these twenty eight men all with specific jobs but each one is crucial.

AZ: Everyone had to know which way to run so you don't bump into the other one.

EH: Oh, you had a pattern of…..

AZ: Sure.

EH: Tell us about that.

AZ: Well I would say it's so drilled into you where to go what to do that no one tripped over the other person. Each guy had a certain direction to go to, he had a certain thing to do and the other fella had something else to do, it was all planned out. I didn't plan it out, some higher ups might have where your not gonna run into this guy and has not gonna run into you. I say a fire up in Passaic one time where firemen bumped into each other they didn't know what the heck they were doing. This was very, very good. I would say these men were excellent at this stuff.

EH: So it was a great deal of planning and organization.

AZ: Yeah, it was planned out long ago and all drilled into the men. Over the years new men came in, you know, you learned, first jobs you got. I went out on the Mine Planter and pulled targets – first job, easy. You don't know anything about guns, you're just learning. So you go out there and pull the target. I met a man over here who was a friend of the man who was the Captain of the boat and that Captain was a Corporal. Corporal, he was Captain of that L-40, forty foot boat. Now a days he would probably be a Captain. Now a days there are three crew men; a man in the engine room, Captain, and a telegraph operator. And we'd go out there and pull targets. And they fire at the boats that are targets by mistake, sometimes. The range section would make a mistake, that happened several times. This guy telegraphing back and forth and what it was was sub caliber ammunition. I didn't tell you about this. You put a fixture into the barrel of the gun. A shell, thirty seven millimeter, about that long. That's called sub caliber ammunition because it goes inside the bore inside the barrel, see. And you use this first to zero in the gun. And then you fire for real using the big stuff 1046 pound ammunition. I gave Tom Hoffman a book on this stuff some time ago. So E Battery used x-caliber ammunition. It had a smaller barrel so they had to mount theirs on the outside. Clamps went around the barrel like this, and the gun was on top. They used the same shell, but they had it outside – x-caliber, like a sub caliber. Like we could fit ours – the whole works went inside because there was plenty of room in there. That's what they did first. I thought some of those shells were lost but I don't think so they were very careful every round. I read in the paper about stuff being lost here or being found. It was misplaced that one time. We were very careful with our ammunition.

EH: Everything had to be accounted for and signed out? Was it like requisitioned?

AZ: Yeah, the officers did this. We were allotted so many rounds and it was kept locked up, taken out to the guns, used. What wasn't used if something happened that you couldn't use it, it went back to Ordinance or the arsenal wherever it came from, you know, for those guns. For the disappearing guns we had ammunition stored there all the time. Lots of rounds of ammunition stored in those rooms down there. And it didn't get lost. It was always locked and everybody knew where it was. It wasn't scattered about. I was surprised when I read about that. Years ago they were finding all kinds of rounds. There were some careless guys around. Something maybe got lost, they'd say forget it. I don't know what happened but we were very careful. Our Officers were smart. Most of

them were West Point Graduates. Not many who weren't. And they knew their stuff they knew what they were doing. Is this thing on?

EH: What you could describe at the tail end of this description is how did the men react about working on the guns? Was it a mystery? Were they mystified by it? Was it a feeling of power?

AZ: I think it was a feeling of power. I didn't think about that but now that you mention it, I think that's what it was. They were young men, most of them were young. They'd buy a car make a lot of noise with the car, you know, gun it. Get the cut out with the muffler. Well I think this was part of that too. You wanted to make noise you felt powerful. Lots of noise. Most of the men were young and it was a big thrill.

EH: Did it occur to them about the dangers involved?

AZ: We knew it was dangerous, everybody knew it.

EH: Did you hear any rumors of other mishaps – not necessarily here but were there any things circulating that maybe at such-and-such a fort there was a major catastrophe of any sort. Did any rumors float around in those days?

AZ: I don't recall anything. Not in those days. All I can tell you in those days if there was anything that was going to do any harm they would stop firing. And it was something pertaining to civilians. In Fort Tilden they had two sixteen inch guns. Our Battery used to go out there and fire those guns. I wasn't there because I wasn't in the Army yet. They fired them last in 1935. They broke so many windows in that area that they decided not to fire those guns anymore. They kept them there for quite awhile. I don't know when they took them out of there, but they didn't fire them anymore. And they used to fire a shell that would go 30 miles. Down near Ocean Grove it would land. That was quite a feat in those days. I understand those two guns were Navy guns. The Navy gave to the Army, two sixteen inch guns. I was there I saw them, but I never fired them. And they didn't fire them anymore because of all the concussion, problems with concussion. I don't think I heard much about any bad accidents anywhere. I know one fella from here transferred up to Fort Ethan Allen Field Artillery. A friend of mine named Albert Morganetti. I told him you're crazy, you're gonna be shoveling manure up there. He went up there – he wanted to get in the Field Artillery, smaller guns, you know, easier. We were up to Plattsburgh on maneuvers in 1939 and I saw him in Plattsburgh and he saw me and he said oh, am I sorry, I'm doing is shoveling manure all day. (LOL)

EH: And you told him, you warned him. (LOL)

AZ: We all warned him. (LOL) He was a nice guy I hated to see him leave.

EH: What was the general image of Fort Hancock? Someone once told me it considered like a country club at various periods. That it was considered one of the most….. just a nice place to be.

AZ: I thought the exact opposite of Fort Hancock. It's very isolated, away. If you don't have transportation, you're 'up the creek' here. I can name many forts, though, that are much better than Fort Hancock. Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, Governors Island six minutes from South Ferry, Fort Totten in Bayside Queens. This was a bad place.

EH: This was considered like 'no man's land'.

AZ: No mans land. It was six miles from the barracks to the Gate. And what do you have out there, you have Highlands, which was nothing. It's still like nothing, a tiny community.

EH: Did soldiers go out much? Did they have opportunities? Except on foot, I guess.

AZ: Well this fella, Rosgar (?) I met, I met him because he gave me a ride. He was in civilian clothing and I was hitchhiking and he gave me a ride out the gate. Sometimes we'd get a ride from somebody. The MP's never gave you a ride. They patrolled back and forth they never picked you up. They didn't care if you walked or you died. I guess they didn't want to set a president or they'd be chauffeuring people back and forth. I think the older men went to these nearby towns. The ones that like to drink would go to these saloons. Most of us didn't drink. We weren't old enough to drink. Most of us were under 21. I didn't drink. I had no interest in a saloon. And we didn't have much money. I used to hitchhike home to see my mother and brothers and sister. Sometimes I'd go with another fella where he lived or to New York or something. I went once with a fella to the other side of Albany to stay with his family. That was in 1939 a Fourth of July weekend. July 1, 2nd, and 3rd and the 4th we had to be back here because we had a parade in Keansburg. We had this famous parade in Keansburg and it was so hot and we wore the winter blouses. We didn't have summer uniforms we just had a khaki shirt. Some other outfits had summer uniforms we didn't. We had the regular stuff, except for the khaki shirt. I remember we paraded Fourth of July in Keansburg in 1939. And I just came back with this fella.

EH: Your expedition up north.

AZ: A couple of other guys we went to their houses. A friend of mine lived near New Brunswick, the fella that joined the Army with me. We became friends, we're still friends. I was to his house a few times and he came to our house. We never had money, I used to give my mother money. But I never had interest in these towns around here.

**END OF INTERVIEW**