

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with James Ahrens by Vincent Santucci  
Topeka, Kansas  
September 29, 2010

VINCE SANTUCCI: Very general questions once we start like when and where you were born, things like that. And we'll kind of lead up chronologically to your time at P.O. Box 1142.

JAMES AHRENS: Very good.

VS: Okay, very good. All right. So let's see, to begin, today is Wednesday, September 29, 2010. And this is a phone interview of a veteran from P.O. Box 1142 and this is being conducted by telephone with the P.O. Box 1142 veteran by the name of James Ahrens; is that correct?

JA: That's correct.

VS: And Mr. Ahrens currently resides in Kansas.

JA: Yes, I'm a retired law professor here in Topeka, Kansas [01:02].

VS: Okay, very good. And again, we're conducting the interview by telephone. My name is Vince Santucci. I'm the chief ranger at the George Washington Parkway. And accompanying me is ranger David Lassman. So thank you, Mr. Ahrens. We really appreciate your time. The first question that I have is just a very general question and that is when and where you were born.

JA: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri in June 7, 1919.

VS: Okay, and did you grow up there?

JA: No, my parents happened to be Presbyterian missionaries out in India at the time and they were back on their first furlough after they had gone out there. They went out in 1910 [02:01] and their first return to the states was in 1919. And my mother was pregnant with

me and delivered me during their stay here. And then they went back to India [02:15].

VS: Okay, so you lived in India for a while?

JA: Yes, until I was 18.

VS: Wow.

JA: I came home twice that I recall, of course, once when I was 10 years old and then the last time, of course, was to stay and that was in '37. By the way, you might be interested, we came through Germany in '37 and we stayed with a Jewish family in Düsseldorf, Germany [02:53], and he was a doctor. We had heard a great deal about the persecution of the Jews [03:01] and were -- had been surprised because my father, who was of German extraction, a farm boy from Missouri; he wanted to know what was going on in Germany. So the best way to find out was to go there. And that's what we did. And he, my mother, and three of my younger siblings were with us. And my father had by chance met a German person in India [03:40] and discovered, of course, that he was from Germany hearing him talk. He met him at the store, and this young fellow was buying hides in India for a German shoe manufacturer. And my dad [04:00] took him home and he stayed with my father for about a week. And while he was there, he found out our family was going to Germany the next summer, which was in -- this was '36 but we were going there in '37, which we did. And so that was one of the rather interesting experiences we had in Germany the summer of '37. Many other very interesting events took place; then we came on home to the states.

VS: Are you the oldest?

JA: Well, I'm right in the middle. I have two sisters and a brother older, and two sisters and a brother younger.

VS: Okay. And so when you came back, did you come back to Kansas [05:00]?

JA: No. I came -- we came back to the farm where my dad had grown up in Northern Iowa and just east of Mason City, about 50 miles east. Many of his relatives had farms in that area and, of course, his father and mother. And so we visited with them and then went to Chicago. I graduated from the University of Chicago Law School, got a doctorate there. I had four years of World War II [05:48] service in between. I had started the law school -- my law school career before the war. It was interrupted by four years of service and then I came back [06:00], completed my law school work and obtained a doctor of law degree and later got a position here in Topeka, Kansas [06:13] teaching that honor law school at Washburn where I taught for 40 years.

VS: Well that's great. So let's see, so your education was interrupted because of the war.

JA: Yes.

VS: And were you drafted or did you enlist?

JA: I tried to enlist but my eyes were not 20/20 and in those days the service that I wanted to serve in, either the Air Force [06:45] or the Navy, but Navy [06:46] -- Naval Seven -- I think it was called -- I don't recall the exact nomenclature of that Naval service [07:00], but I wanted to get into it in any case. Neither the Air Force [07:05] nor the Navy [07:07] would take me with my eye problem, that I had to have correction 20/20 by use of glasses. And so I decided to wait until I was drafted, which I was. I was drafted through St. Louis [07:25]. My parents were not, of course, here in the states, but one of my mother's sisters lived in St. Louis so I had registered that as my home address. So I went in to Jefferson Barracks [07:45] [unintelligible] just outside, west of St. Louis [07:50].

VS: And did that occur -- I presume that occurred after Pearl Harbor [07:56]?

- JA: Yes. That was in -- let me see [08:01] -- April of '42.
- VS: Okay. Do you recall when you learned about -- the first time you heard about Pearl Harbor [08:14]?
- JA: Absolutely. I was doing the dishes. I was working at a co-op dining place, going to law school on Sunday and it was about after dinner, I would say, about 1:00. And I was in the kitchen, along with a couple of the others doing dishes. We had a radio there. And it's said, "We interrupt to announce that the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor [08:54]." And so I can pretty well place it at least Chicago [09:01] time about 1:00 p.m. that Sunday.
- VS: Okay. So you went on then in the next spring to enlist in the military.
- JA: I continued my law work and then got my draft notice, went down to St. Louis [09:24] from Chicago and went out to Jefferson Barracks [09:28] and went through preliminary training. And I was then sent to Fitzsimmons General Hospital [09:40] in Denver, Colorado and was trained of all things as a dental technician.
- VS: Very good. So you did your basic training at the Jefferson Barracks?
- JA: At Jefferson Barracks [09:55], yes.
- VS: Okay. And then you went to Denver [10:00].
- JA: Yes.
- VS: Were you -- what rank were you when you were a dental --
- JA: I was a private.
- VS: Private, okay.
- JA: Private.
- VS: And so, how long did you get to work doing dentistry?

JA: I was there for three months, and I met a girl there who became my wife. I was married there in an Army [10:26] -- by an Army chaplain in September of '42.

VS: Okay. And then were you reassigned?

JA: Yes, then I went down to Texas to Camp Barkeley, Texas [10:51] with the 90th Division [10:54] and I was an assistant to a dental officer and we [11:00] were rapidly pulling teeth of some of the southern boys who failed to brush their teeth when they were growing up.

VS: Okay. And how long were you in Texas?

JA: I was there three months. And then I applied -- my commanding officer recommended that I apply for officer's training, which I did. And I was given an examination and they accepted me and I was then sent to Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland [11:42] in the chemical warfare division of the U.S. Army [11:50]. And after a number of months I was commissioned a second lieutenant in [12:00] chemical warfare.

VS: Okay, and then where were you sent from that point?

JA: Okay, then I was sent down to Alabama [12:17] for a weapons training. And I was there for a couple of months and then was assigned to military police at Fort Custer, Michigan [12:33]. And I spent -- I was there about six months training military police, both officers and men who were going over to North Africa [12:51] to bring back German and Italian POWs [12:56] captured in the North African campaign [13:00].

VS: So you were an instructor for military police?

JA: Right.

VS: You had a very diverse military career.

JA: Yes, I did. That wasn't the end of it [laughs].

VS: Okay. Okay, so where did you go from Custer [13:21] in Michigan?

JA: I was then sent to Camp Shenango, Pennsylvania [13:28] for our overseas assignment. And, of course, that was all hush, but the rumor was that we were going to the Anzio Beachhead because my training in chemical warfare had been on firing 4.2 -- I do have lapse of memory -- mortars, 4.2 mortars, which were then [14:00] being used. At least -- at first we were trained to use, of course, poison gas. But that was not done by either our side or the German, so we were then prepared to use other kinds, that would be white phosphorous, to put up a curtain of smoke and those would explode, and then AG high explosives. Those were all the largest that we had at that time, the 4 point -- that was 4.2 inches diameter of the shell.

VS: We're getting curious as to what led you to P.O. Box 1142 [15:00]. So when you completed your assignment at that site, where did you go next?

JA: Okay. I was -- we were told, as I said, that we were going overseas. My wife was with me there at Camp Shenango [15:16]. We were off base. And I took her -- drove her back to Denver and left the car there and returned to Shenango with the expectation that I was going to go overseas and I received orders to go to Washington, D.C. And that's when I arrived and was -- went over to a hut at 1142 and introduced myself and started my training. That was in the late fall of '43 [16:00].

VS: Okay, so in the fall of '43 then, you received orders and traveled to Washington, D.C. And did you know what you would be doing?

JA: I had no idea.

VS: Okay.

JA: I reported then to this post, which was along the highway that borders the river down to

George Washington's home. And I reported to a Colonel Wolfe [16:40] and he and his adjutant was a Major Reed [16:53]. And those two then told me what I was [17:00] there for.

VS: And what were you there for?

JA: It turned out that we were not in any way connected to interrogation of German or other enemy personnel. We were there to instruct mostly B-17 pilots and crews going overseas to Germany and Europe in methods of escaping and getting out of either France or Germany, where they might be shot down or their crew or their plane. And so what we did -- first of all, I was trained in the instruction in this program and [18:00] then after a period of training, which lasted about three months, those of us who had graduated were sent out on training missions throughout the United States. We went to various Air Force [18:22] staging areas and I then went all along both the East Coast, the South, and the West Coast of the United States to Air Force areas where pilots and crew were going overseas, were being staged in preparation to go overseas. And I had been trained first of all to give a [19:00] brief lecture about methods of escaping and avoiding capture. And then we would show a film which had been prepared by the Army [19:15] regarding the kind of interrogations that the Germans or people who captured them were given. And then we had exhibit A, which was always an individual officer or enlisted man who had been shot down -- whose plane had been shot down over Europe and who had successfully escaped and come back to the States or escaped to England. Now we didn't give them details on that, as you can imagine, but [20:00] we did give them general instructions on what to do in the event that the plane was shot down if they survived, of course.

VS: So you went to 1142 [20:14] and you received three months of training in escape and evasion.

JA: Right.

VS: And --

JA: And that was for instructing others in methods.

VS: Okay. And so we probably want to talk a little bit about that training that you received first. But did you ever hear that program referred to as the MIS-X [20:38] program?

JA: Yes, probably, vaguely that recalls to mind. I remember, as I said, two officers in charge of our program, we were rotated in that area and knew that there were other programs going on [21:00] that had certain relation to certain activities regarding the Germans and Italians. I didn't hear so much about the interrogation of Italians, but I did know that they had a number of people, American officers and others interrogating Germans. But we paid very little attention to that and we were instructed not to pay any attention. So we kept to our side -- ourselves and we did not much fraternize with the other groups.

VS: Did you ever see any of the prisoners?

JA: No, never did. I was told the officers who did the interrogation from time to time. In fact [22:00], one of them and I lived -- had rented a place in Alexandria, Virginia [22:09] because we were not required to live on the base. And so we would come in every morning, report for duty, and then spent the day until 5:00 and then we left in the evening. That was while we were being trained. Then, of course, after training we were sent out off base instructing missions. And I went to a number of different air bases throughout the United States and gave this lecture and presented the individuals that were with me to tell his tale, their situation of what had happened and how he had escaped

[23:00] --

VS: Okay.

JA: -- and about specific details regarding where they had come.

[audio break]

Well, you know, when you leave the plane, don't pull the ripcord immediately. Let yourself fall until you were close to the ground. It'd be [unintelligible]. And if it's dark, how to let them know when to pull the ripcord [laughs]. I said whistle. If the noise comes back, you're close [laughs]. Anyway, we had fun at it.

VS: Well very good. So do you recall much about your training during that first three months, some of the subjects that they covered?

JA: Yes, mostly it would be just exactly what I have [24:00] suggested here. First of all, it was -- we did not, except on one occasion, actually go out of that area for training. We went to another Air Force [24:20] base -- and I forgot what the name of that was -- down in Virginia, but most of our training was basically information that we should share with these crews, mostly bomber crews. And, of course, the big hit was always the individuals that we [25:01] took along with us, and we always did, whose plane had been shot down over Europe and who had successfully escaped. Some of them had not been previously trained, but others had been.

VS: So did you know anything about different kinds of devices like button compasses?

JA: Right. Not at that time. See, I was there at the base for a little over a year, as I said. I arrived there the late fall of '43, and I left for China [26:00] in the spring of '45 because there was -- the European war was about over; in fact it had been. And they were preparing for a major assault on Japan. So I was sent to -- ended up in Kunming, China

[26:30] with an organization similar to the one that I was serving with at Fort Hunt [26:37]. And I spent the rest of the war years there doing essentially in China what we had instructed [inaudible] communicated to our pilots and crew. Now [27:00] --

VS: Are you there?

JA: You must have gone. Hello?

VS: Yes, hello?

JA: Okay. We just lost the connection for a -- what was the last that you heard?

VS: You were talking about you were doing the same kinds of things in China that you were doing for the European theater.

JA: Yes. And it was there in China that I received some of these items that pilots used. In China we were instructing almost exclusively fighter pilots with the 14th -- who were serving with the 14th Air Force [27:57] in China [28:00]. And so, in those -- at that time I received these, like, packets in which we had been trained and we passed the along to the flyers. It was a plastic holder, and it had a method of communication, and it had instructions on ways in which you could send messages if you were captured and a prisoner. And this now was in Japan or in one of the areas held by the Japanese. Now we didn't have -- at least I never received any of this material or information [29:00] in -- at Fort Hunt [29:03].

VS: Okay. Are you familiar with the Air-Ground Aid Service [29:12]?

JA: I do have some recollection of that. There were connections with people in the prison camps that we had set up and had communication, if that's what you're talking about when you talk about Air-Ground Aid Service [29:36]. I don't know if that's it.

VS: So you were communicating with Americans being held prisoners?

JA: Yes, exactly. And there was communication by these special methods that were used and there was training regarding ways of [30:00] concealing the message and how it could be communicated and received outside. But as I said, that was done almost exclusively, at least as far as I was aware, only in China in regard to the Japanese for POWs [30:23]. In fact, a group of us were ordered to go over to Formosa [30:30], which the Japanese had occupied, to check the condition of American POWs. That happened, of course, after August when the Japanese had finally capitulated.

VS: While the war was going on in the Pacific, you were able to effectively communicate with Americans being held prisoner?

JA: I [31:00] did not personally.

VS: Okay.

JA: The organization, yes, did. I was -- my specific duty was going out to the air bases and conducting information almost the same as that which I had done back in the States.

VS: So you were giving briefings to airmen that were going to go on missions --

JA: Yes.

VS: -- in China, okay.

JA: At forward airbases in China working out of Kunming.

VS: Okay, very good. So I just wanted to go back to 1142 [31:44] a little bit. In the training did you learn anything about coded messages?

JA: Again, I don't recall anything during that [32:00] time of coded messages. I may have had some information. I may have carried it on, but my recollection on coded messages is pretty much connected to the service in China.

VS: Okay.

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

JA: Oh, I've done 15 to 20 various missions during the period that I was there in Alexandria [00:11]. And every mission, I had with me Air Force [00:19], either an officer or an enlisted man who had been shot down over Europe. In every case that was the exhibit.

VS: So you would have at least one --

JA: Yes, I --

VS: -- one of the --

JA: -- always had one.

VS: Okay.

JA: And they had different experiences. Some had escaped. Most of them managed to escape capture and a good many of them had been shot down over France, some of them over Germany [01:00] itself, but we had a number. I don't recall that we kept track on, you know, where all of them had actually been shot down, but I know that there were some who were shot down over Germany, but the large majority were France -- in France, and the general movement was in the direction of Spain. We had the French Maquis [01:34] who were very active and they were prepared to help anybody to escape the German occupation which as you know half of France was divided north to south, half and half, and the Maquis [01:57] that I'm talking about, the Underground [01:59] French [02:00] were working in that portion that the Germans have entertained for themselves, not German but France.

VS: Well you have a very good memory.

JA: Well [laughs] for that part, yes.

VS: So it -- they took three months to train you.

JA: Right.

VS: That seems like a long time.

JA: Well it may have been less.

VS: Okay.

JA: But we had a variety of experiences where we discussed and got to know each other.

There was quite a group of us there. I recall there was a Member of Parliament [02:53] from England of course who I think was House of Lords [03:00] in some way who was sent over to our organization as an instructor. He did -- told us about what we might expect in Japan. That was preliminary to being sent over to China and that was the first time I recall hearing that we were going not to destroy the emperor or remove him, that the emperor was going to be able to hold the Japanese army together, the Japanese people, and it was absolutely essential that we not remove the emperor. So later on when in fact that happened, it was sort of preliminary information that I had way back in '44 [04:00] regarding that. Well then there were a number of the rest of us. And we changed stories because we were all going by that time -- going out to doing the same type of work throughout the United States and we'd compare notes, you know, what happened, tell stories, and so on.

VS: So did you go across the United States and give the briefing?

JA: Yes, I did. I went and I cannot remember all of the bases, but all up and down the East Coast. I didn't go to any base north of Washington, D.C. The bases were down, two or three or four all the way down. I didn't go [05:00] to any base in Florida, but Georgia, Tennessee, Carolinas, Virginia, down to the base north of New Orleans, across to just

outside of San Francisco, and up and down the West Coast there were a couple, and Denver which was an air base for -- yeah, Denver, came to Topeka. There's an air base here. That's how I first found out about Topeka. There's another base west of here, Herington. There was one in Nebraska that I visited or two in Nebraska [06:00] so I covered the country pretty much.

VS: Well very good. David do you have any questions?

DAVID LASSMAN: [inaudible]

VS: Other than Wolfe [06:17], is there anybody else that you remember from 1142 [06:22]?

JA: Well I mentioned Reed [06:24].

VS: Reed and Wolfe, yes.

JA: Who was the assistant -- yeah, we had a couple that sort of were -- stand out. One was a former motion picture actor, Erik Rhodes [06:39]. Rhodes played in some of -- movies with Fred Astaire and he gave us a little skit on when he played the Italian count in one of [07:00] the movies I recall and that was entertainment there at Fort Hunt or 1142 [07:07]. And there was a Captain Watson [07:12] who received the Medal of Honor. He had been a coast watcher down in Guadalcanal [07:20], the early stages, as you will remember from when we were just moving into the Pacific and particularly when our Marines were located in Guadalcanal.

VS: Do you -- do you recall -- you had mentioned there was somebody from England. Were there -- were there others that were from England?

JA: No, this gentleman that I referred to, I don't even [08:00] recall his name. He was quite colorful, typical Englishman. He was an older man. I would say at least, well, 55, 60 maybe thereabouts. I do recall he claimed to be a Member of Parliament [08:22] and I

think he said the House of Lords [08:25]. He did, as I said, most of the information regarding China and particularly Japan. I don't recall his saying that he had been in Japan, but he was certainly very well informed about Japan and the Far East.

VS: When they decided to send you to the Pacific, had the war in Europe ended already?

JA: Yes, it had.

VS: Okay.

JA: I went [09:00] over in -- well let's see. I'm not sure. I went over in April of '45 or thereabouts and the war in Europe had not yet concluded. It happened in, what, June or July of that year?

VS: And you had no other training preparing you to go to the Pacific?

JA: None at all with the exception of the fact, I assumed that the reason I had been sent over there was because of the background of having grown up in India [09:36]. And I suppose I may have thought that that would make it easier for me to adjust and get along with people in that country, although I had never been to China for any length time. But when we arrived -- now I have [10:00] difficulty in remembering in Kunming [10:04] who our officer was, the chief official. I have clear memory of both Reed [10:15] and the other gentleman. The reason I know about the colonel is that Neely [10:27] was a judge from St. Louis [10:31], Missouri so there was that sort of glaring connection between himself and myself by having been born in St. Louis so I knew that he was from St. Louis. The rest of members there in Alexandria [10:53] were persons that I don't much remember the details of them [11:00]. If I heard names, I might recall some of their names.

VS: David, do you have any questions?

DL: No just [inaudible].

VS: Do you remember the names of any of the escaped Americans that went along with you on the trainings?

JA: Well, you know, oddly enough, I -- my wife read your letter. I began to think over it. I cannot remember what was -- it's amazing. They were -- came from different places and I took them out on one mission and -- but then I do not know what they did or what happened [12:00] after we came back from the -- from the mission. I never asked them, nor was I supposed to get any precise details of the names. Their names I should have -- should be remembered, but I do not recall any of -- I know, as I said, some of them were enlisted men. They had all been -- most of the Europeans, in fact all that I can remember, were bomber crews that had been shot down in Germany or France. The one way that I do recall whether [unintelligible] been shot down, but I can't remember their names. We only told them, if they were shot down over Germany, not to [13:00] attempt to contact anybody traveling back and -- because, in Germany, everybody is an enemy and would turn you over. There wouldn't be the slightest doubt, so we knew that those that had come out of Germany were especially -- had an especially difficult time getting out, whereas in France, it was much easier because they were fairly easily contacted again. We were never -- we never told them to.

VS: In some of the interviews that we've had with other individuals involved in the escape and evasion programs that did briefings, they indicated that once a pilot or somebody on a [14:00] -- on a plane was shot down and successfully escaped and evaded, they would never be allowed to go back to the military zone with the fear that, if they were captured again, they would have knowledge about how they escaped and provide that to their interrogators. Does that --

JA: That's correct. Nobody that I contacted or heard about over here in the Washington area, the group that we were serving with, none of those pilots or enlisted men ever in fact came back. In other words, they never reenlisted. But that did happen over in China, but it was in a different situation. What happened there was that some of the POWs [15:00] that had been moved [unintelligible] when the Japanese conquered the Philippines and had been involved in the so called Death March [15:16] to prisons in Northern Luzon, they had been transferred shortly before I arrived in China from the prison camp in Northern Philippines. They were being transported by Japanese cargo ships up north along the coast of China. And on the way, one of these ships carrying a number of prisoners was torpedoed by the [unintelligible] an American [16:00] ship probably underwater and very few escaped, but some of the people who escaped from that cargo ship were sent back to the States. Now that -- as I said that happened before I arrived. But one of those individuals who had managed to survive the sinking of the ship had gotten to shore, had been brought back by our operatives in China to Kunming [16:42], sent back to the States, and he had come back as an enlisted officer when I was there. And again, I cannot remember his name, but he -- I asked him, I said [17:00], "Why in the world do you want to come back after you've had those experiences?" Particularly the years that he had spent in that prison camp, and he said, "I came back to kill some of those sons of bitches that mistreated me and my buddies." So there was one person who -  
- but he was not a shot down flier.

VS: Okay, well, very good. Let's see and do you recall where you were when you learned about the end of the war in the Pacific?

JA: Yes, exactly. I was there back in Kunming [17:49] and there was general celebration.

We had heard that -- well Chiang Kai-shek [18:00] had a very bad reputation already with the American troops in China and it was generally understood that weapons and other military material that the United States was sending to Chiang Kai-shek were not being used to attack the Japanese or the northern -- the Chinese communists, but were being hoarded by Chiang Kai-shek [18:37] for the war against the communists after the Japanese had been defeated by us. And so we had actual rumors that we were armed, prepared -- in preparation for a possible takeover by the Chinese troops [19:00] towards the end of the war. And it never developed, but it was very clearly more than just rumor that he was not to be trusted nor were the Chinese troops. But all of us, each of us officers over there in China received a Chinese person who was our interpreter. And I had a very unusual experience because my Chinese assigned interpreter happened to have a father who had an import-export business and this young [20:00] fellow who was my interpreter had gone to the same school out in India [20:05] that I had attended so it was very interesting coincidence.

VS: That certainly is. How were -- were you supported at all, your activities, by the locals, by the Chinese? Did they serve sort of as resistance?

JA: You're talking about the Chinese?

VS: Yes.

JA: When I got to China, I was assigned [unintelligible]. I had different missions, sometimes taking money up to the front -- operators on the front lines. What we had was quite a network in China in which [21:00] individuals -- all American fliers in China had on the inside of their flight jackets a Chinese flag with Chiang Kai-shek [21:15] [unintelligible] and a message written in Chinese which said "this is an American flier." Oddly enough,

any Japanese when they saw us thought -- beg your pardon, many Chinese, when they saw us, thought we were Japanese. These fliers were really quite ignorant of what was -- they knew there was a war. They knew that they were being invaded, but none of them, or at least most of the ones that I ran across, had never seen the Japanese [22:00], so they did not know and they would frequently run away when I would appear there because they thought I was possibly Japanese. Now I don't know how widespread this was, but it happened more than once that I had difficulty in getting assistance and where -- that I was confronted with hostile people because I needed some assistance or food or whatever. And I was told by some of them and by my interpreter that that might be the case. One of the problems in China was not only that they were rather ignorant about, you know, what was -- and who the Japanese were and who the Americans were, what we were doing over there, but [23:00] my own interpreter was only able to interpret in certain areas because every small area of China has a different language, and so he couldn't communicate any better than I could in many of these situations. And as I said I would go -- I would leave Kunming [23:25]. I would either be flown up to one of the forward bases and do my presentation. Now there in China I did not have anybody to go with me who had been brought back, which to me, suggested to me that we may not have been bringing back that many, but our network was very active in making communications with Americans in POW [24:00] camps in Formosa [24:04] and on up in Northern China. And in fact when -- what surprised me at the end of the war and sometime afterwards when I was ordered along with two other officers with whom I was serving, were ordered to go to Shanghai [24:28]. We went through China up to the Yangtze River [24:35], hired a junk, took our Jeep up on it, weapons and so forth, and we took the junk down the

Yangtze River all the way to Shanghai. Well the Yangtze doesn't run into Shanghai. It runs north of it and [25:00] we went through the city of Nanking [25:05]. I don't know whether you've heard of that, but prior to our entry into the war, prior to Japan attacking us on December 7th, they had of course taken over Northern China, Manchukuo [25:23] and all of that and in the early days they had had a tremendous -- created tremendous destruction in Nanking which is along the Yangtze River [25:40] north of Shanghai [25:43]. So we had heard that the Japanese had been, you know, all sorts of horrible tales that come out of there prior to the war, to our entry. And so when we went through [26:00], the three -- two officers, myself, went through Nanking [26:05], we were really quite concerned because as you know the Japanese capitulated in August and we were called back in September which is just the following month. And the Japanese had not stacked their arms or given them up there in Nanking or in North China, and they were all over particularly in that city. And it's almost unbelievable, but the Japanese troops were there. Of course, this was after surrender, but apparently the control that the emperor had and the fact that the emperor had given up and [27:00] had such an effect that these Japanese troops armed -- they were all armed with rifles and other weapons and we went right through there as we had gotten off the junk and were driving now to Shanghai [27:19] and it was unbelievable. They acted like they didn't see us. I couldn't -- and to us, you know, we thought, well, it's not unlikely that any one person would figure to make himself or -- himself a hero by shooting us, but nobody attacked us.

VS: Very interesting. So when you returned after the end of the war in September, did you fly back to the United States or did you go by boat?

JA: No, came back by airplane as I had gone [28:00].

VS: Okay.

JA: Went over by plane, the C-47. That was a workhorse of transportation in World War II [28:11]. Went over there in the C-47, went over the hump, and came back directly across the Pacific and that it is in San Francisco; then went on up to my wife's home in Denver.

VS: So you never returned to 1142 [28:30]?

JA: Yes, I have been there a couple of times because my sister lives there in Alexandria [28:39] just a mile up the road and I have visited her on more than one occasion. And so I told them quite some time ago that that's where I'd served and so we found the area and drove around; in fact [29:00], my wife said -- when were last there, Marge [spelled phonetically], about four or five years ago?

MARGE AHRENS: Maybe you're thinking of you coming back when you were serving.  
If he's thinking --

VS: No, I was curious. Yes, did you ever go back to 1142 [29:23] right after the war?

JA: Yes, after the war was over I have been there two or three times.

VS: Okay, but you didn't go back there while you were still in the military?

JA: No, I -- when I got back to the States, I went straight to -- well, went to Denver and went to Washington, D.C. I was mustered out there and then final discharge papers Washington, D.C. and I went back to Chicago and started back to my law studies.

VS: Okay [30:00], all right. Just a couple more very quick questions. Do you recall when you were -- when you were receiving training at 1142 [30:12], was that training done inside of buildings or outside of building?

JA: It was mostly in the building. They had low, single-story, what you call them, temporary structures and we had our -- I had lessons there.

VS: Were they Quonset huts?

JA: I beg your pardon?

VS: Were they Quonset huts?

JA: They were not the round type. They were the flat with -- the roofs were -- they were wooden and with V-shaped roofs [31:00], what I would call barracks type, but a little different than barracks. They were painted and so forth.

VS: Okay, and were there other men who were being trained at the same time that you were?

JA: There were. As I was talking to you, I remember one of them was Irish by the name of Limerick, Captain Limerick [31:31]. He was quite a cutup so I sort of remembered him and like I said, I remember Erik Rhodes [31:39]. Now I don't remember whether all of these were given instruction at the same time. All I do know is that they had been trained and were also going out along same routes that I was involved in [32:00].

VS: Okay, well, I think this has been very good. Is there anything that we haven't asked you that we should?

JA: I think you've covered pretty much all that I did there in those years. It was --

[end of transcript]

Index

90th Division, [Tape 1A] 10:54

Air Force, [Tape 1A] 06:45, 07:05, 18:22, 24:20, 27:57  
[Tape 1B] 00:19

Air-Ground Aid Service, [Tape 1A] 29:12, 29:36

Alabama, [Tape 1A] 12:17

Alexandria (VA), [Tape 1A] 22:09

[Tape 1B] 10:53, 00:11, 28:39

Army, [Tape 1A] 10:26, 11:50, 19:15

Camp Barkeley (TX), [Tape 1A] 10:51

Camp Shenango, [Tape 1A] 15:16, 13:28

Chiang Kai-shek, [Tape 1B] 18:00, 18:37, 21:15

Death March, [Tape 1B] 15:16

Düsseldorf, Germany, [Tape 1A] 02:53

Edgewood Arsenal (MD), [Tape 1A] 11:42

Fitzsimmons General Hospital, [Tape 1A] 09:40

Formosa, [Tape 1A] 30:30

[Tape 1B] 24:04

Fort Custer, Michigan, [Tape 1A] 12:33, 13:21

Fort Hunt, [Tape 1A] 26:37, 29:03

Guadalcanal, [Tape 1B] 07:20

House of Lords, [Tape 1B] 03:00, 08:25

India, [Tape 1A] 02:15, 03:40

[Tape 1B] 09:36, 20:05

Jefferson Barracks, [Tape 1A] 07:45, 09:28, 09:55

Kansas, [Tape 1A] 01:02, 05:00, 06:13

Kunming, China, [Tape 1A] 26:30

[Tape 1B] 10:04, 16:42, 17:49, 23:25

Limerick, [Tape 1B] 31:31

Manchukuo, [Tape 1B] 25:23

Maquis / Underground (French) [Tape 1B] 1:34, 01:57, 01:59

MIS-X, [Tape 1A] 20:38

Nanking, [Tape 1B] 25:05, 26:05

Navy, [Tape 1A] 06:46, 07:07

Neely, [Tape 1B] 10:27

North Africa, [Tape 1A] 12:51

Parliament, [Tape 1B] 02:53, 08:22

Pearl Harbor, [Tape 1A] 07:56, 08:14, 08:54

P.O. Box 1142, [Tape 1A] 15:00, 20:14, 31:44

[Tape 1B] 06:22, 07:07, 28:30, 29:23, 30:12

Prisoner of war (POW), [Tape 1A] 12:56, 30:23

[Tape 1B] 24:00, 15:00

Reed, [Tape 1A] 16:53

[Tape 1B] 06:24, 10:15

Rhodes, Erik, [Tape 1B] 06:39, 31:39

Shanghai, [Tape 1B] 24:28, 25:43, 27:19

St. Louis, [Tape 1A] 07:25, 07:50, 09:24

[Tape 1B] 10:31

Watson, [Tape 1B] 07:12

Wolfe, [Tape 1A] 16:40

[Tape 1B] 06:17

World War II, [Tape 1A] 05:48

[Tape 1B] 28:11

Yangtze River, [Tape 1B] 24:35, 25:40