

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ARTHUR J. ANDERSON
U. S. Army, World War II
2006

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Anderson, Arthur, (1922-), Oral History Interview, 2006

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

Arthur Anderson, a Mount Vernon, Wis. native, tells of his experiences as a member of Battery A, 382nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion in the Philippines during World War II. Anderson touches upon basic training at Camp Hulin (Texas) and Camp Young in the Mohave Desert (California) mentioning the lack of drinking water, and anti-aircraft training in New Guinea. Anderson mentions incidences of mental breakdowns caused by jungle conditions and describes his own knee injury and medical treatment while in the Philippines. Stationed in Manila (Philippines) he describes the living conditions of Filipino civilians. Anderson also describes burning dead bodies to prevent the spread of diseases, learning that the U.S. had dropped atomic bombs in Japan, and guarding Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) including former Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. Stationed briefly in Japan, Anderson mentions the reaction of Japanese civilians to American soldiers and his interactions with the Japanese. Anderson recalls being near the USS Missouri as General MacArthur was signing the agreement for Japan's unconditional surrender. Following the war, Anderson briefly worked in the restaurant business, but eventually retired as a carpenter.

Biographical Sketch

Anderson (1922-), a member of Battery A 382nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion during World War II, spent much of his service in the Philippines and Japan. Following his discharge, Anderson was a carpenter until he retired at sixty-two in McFarland (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcript edited by Hannah Gray & Abbie Norderhaug, 2007.

Interview Transcript

John: This is John Driscoll, and today is May 18, 2006, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And this is an oral history interview with Arthur Anderson. Arthur is a veteran of World War II, United States Army. And this interview is being done in his home in McFarland, Wisconsin. And, Arthur, thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Arthur: I was born in Mount Vernon, Wisconsin, June 10, 1922. And I grew up around Madison. Went to school at East High School in 1940. And I worked at the Oscar Meyers when I got out of high school, 1940. Then the war come around in '41 so I went to work for the Gisholt. And then I was drafted in December of '42. And went into the service. Went down to Chicago, down to Fort Sheridan.

John: Okay.

Arthur: And that was a week or two, we were quarantined so we couldn't do anything. But eventually we left for Camp Hulin, Texas. And then we had our basic training there.

John: Do you know where in Texas, Arthur?

Arthur: Camp Hulin. A place called Placis. From there we had most of our basic training. Most of it there. And then we ventured out to California, went into the Mojave Desert, Camp Young. It was a hundred and sixty degrees, July 4, 1943.

John: Oh, wow.

Arthur: And we were there. We did some training there. Then we went to Camp Coxcomb, which is further in the desert. Went out on field trips with so much water. And we had two five gallon cans of water to last you, and then they claimed they couldn't get the trucks in because of the sand and stuff. But they finally came in two weeks, but we were out of water.

John: Oh, man.

Arthur: We were so thirsty, we couldn't wash our hands. We had to salvage all the water that we could save. So they finally came with a trailer full of pop. I had ice in it that melted. But the water at the bottom of the trailer, we got our heads down and sucked the water regardless of how dirty it was.

John: I can imagine.

Arthur: That's how thirsty we were. But that is just one of the things we had. And then we

went on fifteen mile trips until guys started passing out in the desert. It was too hot. With a pack and all that, you can't walk that far. And so we stopped that. And from there we went down to San Diego for amphibious training. And went out, we stayed at the Marine Base in tents, in the parade grounds. And we went out to this Catalina Island one night and waded in. We stayed there all night. We were soaking wet. It was cold, it was damp, you know. And the next morning they finally came back and pulled us out. That was one of the experiences we had there. And they always had the infantry, the obstacle course they had there. We went through all that stuff. Bayonet drill and all. So, from there we went to Camp Cook, which is near Santa Maria, north of Santa Barbara, and we did more training there. I can't remember all the details, but we were all working on the gun, and fighting, and firing, and whatever.

John: By this time you were an anti-aircraft unit?

Arthur: Yea, anti-aircraft. And from there we, this was December. And I thought we were going to go right away, but we didn't leave until January, sometime. And then we went up to Fort Lewis, and there we were ready to ship out. We shipped out March 15th, I think it was. And got on this old ship, a Dutch ship, and we got seasick going through the straights there in Washington. And they had steak and sausage, and that is the worst thing you can have.

John: I know. Yea.

Arthur: So we got outside on the sea and we kind of sobered up on the seasickness. And then we got, we were on the ship fifty-four days. And we got down to Milne Bay, in New Guinea. And we got off for a little bit there. But we had to go back on the ship. We couldn't stay there. And then I think we went to, I don't if I remember if we stopped at Milne Bay or stopped at other places. We loaded up supplies. One of those places there before we went to Finschhafen. And that was our home for almost a year. There we did training. And we went down to Schuyler's Beach and practiced firing. We had these electrical tow planes that we fired at. They had about a six feet wing span, and we would shoot at them. And our 40s, we had, every fifth shell was a tracer. I think that is right.

John: Okay.

Arthur: And we used that. And we had this range finder, range director, that would put the right range and right height and speed and all that in. So the tracers would let you know what to do, provided you knew what to do.

John: Okay.

Arthur: So once in a while they got kind of close. But I think we did hit the plane one

time. But then they had a B-25 or B-26 pulling this target behind them. And if you give them too much range, you would hit this plane.

John: Yea. I wouldn't want to be flying it.

Arthur: When it hit the target, it would explode, like, and then you knew you had hit the target.

John: Okay.

Arthur: And we enjoyed all the rain and the jungle and mosquitoes and malaria and jungle rot. We had all those things beside mental disorder. A lot of people, a lot of them got, I can't explain what I mean.

John: Sure.

Arthur: Went nuts. So, finally, we were all marched up and loaded up with our gun and ready to go to Leyte for the landing there. But that was canceled. Well, in the meantime, we were unloading ships.

John: Oh. boy.

Arthur: So we unloaded ships. And in the rain, or whatever. And we had twenty-four hour duty. We changed shifts. And we, one night we were unloading ships in the rain. It was pouring down. We were unloading oil barrels, or gasoline. I don't know which it was. One of the two. And I slipped between the barrels, like where the barrels come together. And injured my knee.

John: Oh. wow.

Arthur: And so after that, I had trouble. I would go and have heat treatment on it. And I was in the hospital for about a week. Then they kept me going. So I come back again. But my knee would swell up, you know. And couldn't sleep very good on the cots. You roll in a cot, you know, and you can't hardly sleep. Well, anyway, eventually, they decided we were going to go to, let's back track. Where was I?

John: You were at Finschhafen, in the hospital.

Arthur: Okay, from there we went to Manila.

John: Oh, okay.

Arthur: And that was March, of '45. And we landed in Manila Bay, the first ones to land in there. An LST. I think they opened up in the front. And we landed at night, and

it didn't look like there was anything around. But when daylight come, we could see all the ships, the sails and smokestacks and all, sticking up.

John: Okay.

Arthur: In the bay there. But, at night, we unloaded. Drove in there and unloaded. And went down to Manila. And the streetcars, and you could smell the dead bodies all over the place.

John: Oh, well.

Arthur: And went by the legislative building, and that was pretty well demolished. I think they burned it. Then we went to Nicholls Field and set up tents there. And then we stayed there for a short period of time, and we did different things there, too. Then we stayed there, and Filipinos were coming and eating out of our garbage cans. They were so hungry.

John: Yea. Oh, yea.

Arthur: And then we kind of split up, and went in different directions from Manila. And I went down to a place called San Pablo. And it was at the city dump, and there we set up M51. And they had fox holes around it. And we were waiting for the Japs to come down out of the mountains. One night we had to go out on the railroad track and set up, and it was kind of spooky, and it was kind of dark, and you don't know what they can see. And I had the GIs then.

John: Oh, wow.

Arthur: And I really didn't want to go out of the fox hole.

John: Let me ask, what was an M51?

Arthur: M51 was a machine gun. A machine gun. But then we, oh, we had these guerillas help us. And they would help and one day one of these guerillas, I don't know if he was a guerilla but he was a Filipino, and he had his foot had jungle rot on it. And we had the medical stuff in our equipment, so I said I would help him dress it up. So I dressed it up a couple days, not the same day. But he came back and wouldn't you know it, he brought me a hot sweet potato, all hot. And I really enjoyed it.

John: Oh, wow. Great.

Arthur: In appreciation of that. And another night we were in our fox holes and we heard some gunfire. It was late in the morning. One of the guys shot. He didn't know

what he shot until the morning. Here he shot this horse that had been out there.

John: Well, he didn't know.

Arthur: And the Filipinos came the next morning and we thought, boy, they were really going to give us hell. And they thanked us for shooting it, and cut it up, and butchered it right there. So, another time, it rained so hard. We were on the city dump and they had, what the Japs did, they made them dig their trenches and then they buried them. Well, it rained so hard, it washed up this one body. And it was just smelly. And so we just put gasoline on it, and burned it. Because we can't have the flies. You would get malaria, and everything. You know. Disease. So we put fire to it. And a leather jacket, and you could see where he was bayoneted. Through his chest.

John: Oh, wow.

Arthur: And another place was the basement with dead bodies in it. We just threw gas in it and burned that also because of the flies and mosquitoes. And it was hot, you know, and humid. It was terrible. Another one was down under the basement, they had a dirt stairway going down and you could smell down there. So we just threw the gasoline down there and set it. And it went boom! But that way we kept ourselves healthy.

John: Yea. Yea.

Arthur: Another one was a Jap and a crashed captain. He was dead, laying there. And he was starting to, so we burned the whole tent down. It was a straw hut, kind of. So, from there on, we went to the northern part of the Philippines. It was a place called Laguna. And we were there, there was some more firing and that. And then all of sudden we got this atomic bomb message that said Japan was bombed with our atomic bomb.

John: Oh. Wow.

Arthur: So we went out and celebrated.

John: What did you and the guys with you think? What did you think, when you heard that?

Arthur: We couldn't believe it. We couldn't believe it because we didn't know this was ever happening. I thought we would be there another year. So, we didn't do much the next two days, and then they set off the second one. And then we got forty-eight hours notice, so we road all the way. It was about two or three hundred miles to northern Luzon. That is the northern part. Down to Manila, and there we loaded

on barges in the river out to load in the ships. And then we went, got in the ships and started out, and, I don't know, we went a day or two, and then we got hooked in this hurricane. And so we had to pull into a bay, and I can't remember the name of the bay that we went in. But we were there about three days before we took off. And then as we went along on the way, we were picking up ships all the way up. And I think I counted twenty-six.

John: Oh. Wow. Oh, man.

Arthur: And we finally got there. I can't remember. It must have been in the afternoon, and then Tokyo Bay. And then we sat there and you could see those little boats going back and forth, back and forth, to Yokohama. And then the next day was the signing of the peace. And that was very interesting. I was down in the mess hall. I could hear the planes flying over. And there was so many planes in the air and just like in the fall when you see all the black birds, blue birds, I don't know what kind of birds. What do you call them?

John: Birds? Black birds? Starlings? Swallows?

Arthur: Yea, there are all kinds of birds. But these planes, B-29s just kept circling around and circling around. And you could hear them, you could hear them in the distance, you could see the *Missouri*, where MacArthur was signing the agreement.

John: Yes.

Arthur: And then the next day we pulled in, and set up camp in the West Point of Japan. And it was a school where they had instruments and even a Gisholt lathe in there, that we enjoyed watching. Then we spent time, and we were made support company, and MPs. So we were, we unloaded ships. Once in a while we swiped a little steak and butter.

John: Yea. A little requisition.

Arthur: And we had a little cooker, and we would cook our own steak in butter. That is a good treat. We never had that before. And then we guarded all the warehouses. I remember one time, a warehouse was all parachutes in. And another time in another warehouse, they had all beer. And another one, they had a big building, they had all kinds of canned stuff in there. And they would try to swipe it. And we would kind of punish them a little bit. And then they would open stuff in the bottom of the ship that they would help unload, then. And they had toothpaste. So we made them eat the toothpaste. But, anyway, we finally got off, and we finally got orders that we could go home.

John: Oh, man.

Arthur: The First Cavalry was there, with Tokyo. We were in Yokohama. So I left there December 13th, I think it was. I got back in the States the 26th. Christmas Eve. But they didn't let us go in, so we didn't go until the next day. And then we stayed there. A dock strike, so we were on the ship for two weeks. Then we went to Fort Lewis, and finally got, I took the train home, I think. And I got discharged at Camp McCoy.

John: Okay.

Arthur: And I think it was the 13th of January. Then I become a civilian.

John: How long, beginning to end, were you in?

Arthur: Three years.

John: Three years. Okay. When you were in Japan, right after you got there, what was the...

Arthur: I didn't tell you about the prisoners, did I?

John: No, no. Go ahead.

Arthur: I should tell about that. Are we still on?

John: Yes. Yes.

Arthur: Well, like in Japan, you got details to go in, fifteen troops to go in and guard the war prisoners. We had a little cell of our own, a little toilet, and a little cot in there. And that is where we stayed the two weeks we were there. And we'd eat at the same table they would, but we never ate at the same time. And I would watch them. We couldn't take a camera and take any pictures. I'd have some precious pictures if I could have taken them.

John: Oh, yea.

Arthur: But to see them, they had a bull pen out there where they got their exercise. And when we got done with that two weeks, they gave us a kerchief. It was kind of nice. It was all colored. For everyone who stayed there, for appreciation. For taking care of them.

John: You were there when Tojo tried to commit suicide?

- Arthur: Yea, I was down there when Tojo committed suicide. He was supposed to get there. And then Tokyo Rose was supposed to get there, also. But they kept them, they assigned them to headquarters. She is the one who did all the broadcasting on the radio and made us get depressed. But she was quite popular over there. And we enjoyed her.
- John: Tojo tried suicide, but he didn't make it. He did hang.
- Arthur: He survived until they had the hanging on, I think, the 26th of October.
- John: Yea, you had the clipping.
- Arthur: So, that is about it for me.
- John: Oh, wow. When you first got to Japan, what was it like, face to face, with Japanese civilians? And with them with Americans?
- Arthur: Well, they looked us over, because we had these high boots on, you know, with the straps. And it kind of amazed them, having that kind of shoes. And then we had a full pack, and carrying a duffle bag, and gun. And we marched down the street until we found where we were going. We walked quite a bit. So, that was pleasant. We guarded the ships coming in and people would confiscate stuff, and we would stop them.
- John: One of the questions I ask, you were a young man, just starting out in life. You had your whole future ahead of you. And then, boom! This thing happened and you got dragged off to war. What did you feel about that?
- Arthur: Well, I figures it was doing the right thing to be in the service. That is the way most of us felt. And I wanted to. Drafted or enlisted, either one, they were ready to go.
- John: That is what everybody tells me.
- Arthur: If that wouldn't have happened, this wouldn't be.
- John: Yea.
- Arthur: What saved the United States, I talked to a Japanese over there, and he said, they didn't have much of a middle class. They had the high and the low. And so when we could train our middle class, because our low class people weren't as plentiful. And that is one of the reasons he thought we did well.
- John: You know, I've never heard that. But there is something there. Yea.

- Arthur: This was a pilot. Japanese pilot. In fact, I got some Japanese coins from him that are centuries old.
- John: Did you get to meet or know any Japanese? Get to know any of them?
- Arthur: Oh, yea. I talked to this pilot. I was looking for stuff to buy, like bayonets and a kimono. That stuff was plentiful there. One of the other things that the Japanese had trouble with was that their supply lines was too long and they didn't have the ships to get the supplies to their troops. We had the Liberty ship, which they mass productioned. And that is what brought us the supplies. Without supplies, a soldier isn't worth much. So they definitely had supplies for us, most of the time. We had K-rations but most of the time, we even had Australian bully-beef.
- John: At least, it's meat. Or, you think it is. Well, your outfit pretty much stayed together, with all the reunions you have been having. But you said, most of the guys were from the Midwest? Did that just happen, or was that?
- Arthur: Probably just the way the draft went. Most of us got inducted down in Chicago. I think most of us did.
- John: When you came out, you had the GI Bill. Did you use it?
- Arthur: Yea. I went into the restaurant business temporarily. And then I went to carpentry.
- John: Okay. Okay. What did you do after you got out?
- Arthur: I went to work with the Gisholt, for a couple of months. And then I couldn't see working inside. So my mother had this tavern. She wasn't operating it at that time but she had rented it. And I took over, and got licensed, so I run it for a year or two. And then I got out of it, and took up to finish it with carpentry, and that is what I did the rest of my life. And I retired at sixty-two.
- John: Okay. That is great.
- Arthur: But now I raise garden, and I took a lot of lumber and make little stuff out of wood.
- John: Oh, that is great. Well, what a remarkable story. Like I said, when you showed me that book, this is what happened during World War II. The stuff that is in the history books...
- Arthur: Well, I could think of a lot of other things.

John: Well, go ahead, It's your story.

Arthur: I went down in Texas, we had to practice, and we had to take the wheels off the gun to lower it, so that the sheep dip there, and we put the tires on the sheep deep. Top of the sheep dip. And it was kind of rotten. And they fell down into the sheep dip. And we had to fish them out. We had more fun getting them out of that sheep dip. And some guy come along with a horse, and one of the guys decided he wanted to ride it. And he had spurs. So he let him have the spurs. And down the road he took off, he got on it and took off. Those are things. Another thing, we were down on the beach and we had time to waste. And we had these crabs. And I tied a string around two of them and laid it over this guy's belly when he was asleep. And he was fantastic excited when he got up.

John: I'll bet.

Arthur: That was something else.

John: I'll bet. What a remarkable story. Man, this is really something. I had a very good friend, who has just passed away. Steven Ambrose, the writer. And Steven was talking to a bunch of World War II vets here several years ago in Madison, and he was telling them what a remarkable thing they did. And most of them were saying, you know, we didn't really do anything. We did what he had to. But it wasn't much. But he said, "Wait a minute!" He said, "Stand up." And these guys stood up, a little self conscious. And he said, "You were giants! You went out and saved the world." And, you did.

Arthur: Well, if we hadn't been down in New Guinea, if they had got to Australia and had supplies. That is what a lot of people don't realize. What the 32nd Infantry did.

John: And that was touch and go there for so long. I was telling you about this nurse. She was telling me in the hospitals, they had bandages and soap. That was all they could get. Okay. Anything else you want to put on this?

Arthur: Well, we have our reunions. We've had them since, well, we had them when first we got out of the service, in '46. I think that was the first one. And then we had one last September, which would have been the twentieth. So, I guess that is about it.

John: That's wonderful. I am going to shut this off.

[End of Interview.]