

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ARNOLD JOHNSRUD  
Military Police, Army, World War II  
2005

OH  
637

**OH**  
**637**

**Johnsrud, Arnold**, (1920-2010). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 40 min); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract:**

Arnold Johnsrud, a Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a military policeman on Okinawa. He discusses basic training in Little Rock (Arkansas). Johnsrud also details riding a troop train. As a military police officer, he mentions several cases including killings and assaults. Also, Johnsrud discusses the voyage home in a troop ship and mentions his secret to avoid seasickness. He mentions his involvement in the VFW upon his return.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Johnsrud (1920-2010) served as a military police officer on Okinawa, Japan during World War II.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2012.

Transcription checked and corrected by Channing Welch, 2012.

Corrections typed in by Brittani Uhlig, 2013.

Abstract written by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

## **Interview Transcript:**

[Note: Nedra J. is Mrs. Johnsrud.]

MacDonald: [Tape begins in middle of sentence] with Arnold Johnsrud, who served with the United States Army during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 2:00 p.m. at the following address of 6295 County Trunk OO, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of February 3, 2005, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald. Well, Arnold, could you tell me a little bit about what year you were born?

Johnsrud: Born April 17, 1920.

MacDonald: In the Sturgeon Bay area?

Johnsrud: This house.

MacDonald: In this house on the farm, huh?

Johnsrud: Yeah.

MacDonald: Well, good. In your early years, did you go to high school here?

Johnsrud: In Sturgeon Bay.

MacDonald: You went to Sturgeon Bay. Did you graduate?

Johnsrud: Yeah, I graduated.

MacDonald: Okay.

Johnsrud: In 1938.

MacDonald: All right. And how big was your family living on the farm here? Did you have a big family—brothers and sisters?

Johnsrud: Out of (??) five kids, two girls and three boys. Then we had one girl that died, young.

MacDonald: Are these your brothers and sisters?

Johnsrud: No, I mean my own family.

MacDonald: But when you were growing up, did you have some brothers and sisters?

Johnsrud: Oh, I have two sisters, yeah—Connie Anderson and Hazel Anderson in Neenah.

MacDonald: Okay. Now, in 1938 when you got out of high school did you take a job, or did you work on the farm?

Johnsrud: Three years I worked for Warner (??) Grocery for a couple of years. And I worked on the farm, too. I was running the farm, too, at the same time.

MacDonald: How did you happen to get into the military then?

Johnsrud: The draft was—I didn't have no choice: you, you, and you.

MacDonald: What year was that?

Johnsrud: 1944, March.

MacDonald: And did you go down to Milwaukee for induction?

Johnsrud: Yeah.

MacDonald: And were there some other people from Sturgeon Bay that went with you at the time?

Johnsrud: Oh, yeah. There was a whole busload of tavern keepers [laughs]. That was quite a party, though, in Milwaukee, yeah [laughs]. Eickelberg and there was a guy that used to own a—George—oh, Win, Win Larson (??). Him and I and Eickelbert—oh, geez, I can't remember all of them. But we all knew each other, and that was a pretty good party there.

MacDonald: Did you celebrate in Milwaukee before you left?

Johnsrud: [Laughs] Yeah, on the bus, too. Oh, shit, they had beer and every damn thing on the bus, too.

MacDonald: Going down there, huh? So, when you went to Milwaukee, how did they pick you for what branch of service you went into?

Johnsrud: Well, I told them I wanted to get in the Navy. "You're in the Army now." That was it. There weren't no choice.

MacDonald: How about the other guys? Where did they end up? Couple of 'em.

Johnsrud: They all went to Milwaukee, and we went to Fort Sheridan [IL]. But from Fort Sheridan, they got busted up there. I don't know. I wound up in Little Rock, Arkansas.

MacDonald: For basic training?

Johnsrud: Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: What was it like down South at that time?

Johnsrud: Oh, shit, that's the asshole of the world there [laughs]. Yeah, there's hills, there by god, when you got a sixty-pound pack you know it ain't that far away from them damn hills. It was hot. Yeah, yeah, it was hot.

MacDonald: What kind of barracks did they put you in, the living quarters?

Johnsrud: It was six-man huts. And sometimes at night it was cold, and then we'd have a stove, but that wasn't so good either.

MacDonald: What was basic training like? Pretty tough, or was it not too bad?

Johnsrud: It was pretty tough, but I was younger then. I got along pretty good, but we had twenty-mile hikes and all that kind of stuff with a sixty-pound pack and all that crap. Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: It would put you in pretty good shape, then, huh?

Johnsrud: I was in better shape than I am now, yeah [laughs].

MacDonald: After you left Fort—down in, what was it, Fort—

Johnsrud: Joseph T. Robinson Camp [North Little Rock, AR]. That ain't there no more. It's a—at Little Rock, whatever's there now, I don't know, but Joseph T. Robinson was a big Army camp.

MacDonald: Where did you go after basic training? Did you get some time off to come back to Sturgeon Bay?

Johnsrud: Yeah, I got—what was it? Seven days delayed en route or something like that. And I went down to Kansas City and went straight across to California—what is that? Well, we didn't go there, anyhow. They sent us up to Camp Adair, Oregon. They didn't want me there and sent me back down to San Francisco again, whatever the base was there.

MacDonald: How did they ship you across country, how did you get across?

Johnsrud: Train, troop train.

MacDonald: What were they like?

Johnsrud: Oh, it was all full of soldiers, and all kinds of stuff going on in there, I tell you. That was quite a trip [laughs]. There was one guy there who could—he was a kind of entertainer, you know. We were all full of soldiers, the whole thing, the train. And, boy, he played drums on the curtains and the [laughs]—we had lots of fun riding because I just watchin' that guy. He was good; he was pretty good.

MacDonald: On the train, did they take stops to feed you, or how did they feed you on board?

Johnsrud: Oh, we had to line up and go through the mess line.

MacDonald: A dining car type of thing?

Johnsrud: Well, yeah. Well, on the train it wasn't so bad because nobody was sick on the train. But it was on the boat is where we could tell what we're gonna have for breakfast all the way around.

MacDonald: So when they put you in San Francisco, then what did they do with you?

Johnsrud: They what?

MacDonald: When you went to San Francisco.

Johnsrud: Oh, they didn't want us there. They sent us up to—I think it was Camp Adair, Oregon. And I was there for maybe a week or so, I don't know. Sent me back down to Ford Ord [Monterey Bay, California] I was supposed to go out of Fort Ord. Well, then the orders screwed up again, you know, so I went back up again. I took that route, I think, three times all the way up. And then that last time we went up to Seattle—what the hell is that? Not Fort Lewis, yeah, Lawton, Fort Lawton. And we shipped out of there, got on a big troop ship [USS], Admiral Eberle. It was a big ship, but that ship had been all over the world already.

MacDonald: Was it like a cruise ship?

Johnsrud: It was a cruise ship, but now it was a troopship because the Army took it over.

MacDonald: About how many men did you have aboard there at the time when they would sail?

Johnsrud: I think it was 2,600 men, I guess, something like that.

MacDonald: What were the living quarters like onboard ship?

Johnsrud: They had poles with bunks, and I think they were eight high. And I was in the top one. When I went to bed at night, when we were rolling out in the ocean, I made damn sure I wasn't going to roll out because that's a long ways down [laughs]. We used to climb up on the end, you know, to get up there.

MacDonald: There couldn't have been much room between your sack and the—

Johnsrud: No, the other guy was right above you. And then, of course, there was a hallow in the canvas. But it was all right. That's the way it was. Nobody was treated any different.

MacDonald: Mm-humm. Did they make you do anything onboard ship when you were sailing, or was it just taking your time up to go across?

Johnsrud: They tried, yeah. But they lined us up, and then I got to be extra. Someway or other I was late. I got on the end. So I was supernumerary [laughs]. And I worked one night. But I always had to dress up and fall out with the guards. But I worked one night only, because it was always me that could go up to my bunk because the other guys were all picked. But then one night somebody got sick, and a buddy and I had to work there one night. Boy, we rolled that night—son of a gun! We went, somebody said, forty-five degrees. [laughs] Gee, boy, that was—the pounding on the sides of the boat with the sledgehammers, you know. That was a storm. We got to Okinawa, then the tents were all blowed away. Had thirty-six-man tents. But they didn't let us get off. We sat off of there for five, six days. I was on one side of Okinawa for awhile, and then at night the boat started up, going up on the other side. Okinawa ain't that big, but we wound up on the other side.

MacDonald: Was this during the invasion of Okinawa, or was it after?

Johnsrud: It was just after the invasion. We were the first replacements on the way to Japan. So we were the first replacements into Japan. And finally, they put us on the boat again, uh, we were on the boat, and we went to Japan. And we got off at—ah, what the heck is the name of that?

MacDonald: But this is where they already had captured and took control of Okinawa, then.

Johnsrud: Oh, we were the first replacements. The emperor, when he said, "Cut it out," that was the end of it.

MacDonald: Where were you at when they dropped the atomic bombs? Were you at sea?

Johnsrud: I think we might have been at sea because they had dropped it already when I got to Okinawa. Then when we got to Japan, I didn't get to Hiroshima or the other one. I went to—fine thing, I can't think of this—

MacDonald: What was the feeling aboard ship whenever you heard that the Japanese had surrendered, or that they had dropped the bombs?

Johnsrud: It was pretty happy. That was because we had all our combat equipment, you know. It was live ammunition. M-1s and all that. We had the whole thing. So we would have been the first ones going in. I was damn lucky there, damn lucky! Because they'd have mowed us down, by god, like nothing. I mean, they were ready. But then when the Emperor stopped—he was top man, and that was it.

MacDonald: So then when you landed in Japan then, how did the Japanese people react to you?

Johnsrud: Not very nice, no. Oh, they'd come up to us and bow and stuff, but you didn't dare go out on the street at night alone. You always had three, four guys along. Lot of guys, there was a lot of—see, I got in the MPs, and we investigated a hell of a lot of—a lot of these GIs come up from the Philippines, and they'd been all through--they were rough characters. Us guys were kind of green, yet. And we didn't know how rough they had it over there, like down in New Guinea and all that. Boy, those guys had actually killed a few Japs, and we had to pinch—I was in the MPs, and we had to round them guys up, you know, put them in the coop and stuff like that.

MacDonald: What was your rank at that time? What kind of rank did you have? Private, private first class, sergeant, or—do you recall?

Johnsrud: I got to be a private first class. Then I got to be a—before at the (??) sergeant, but that's just under buck sergeant. But then when I got in that next outfit they didn't like a T-4 in there. "Sergeant," [laughs] I was "Sergeant."

MacDonald: So, when you were running as an MP in Japan, that was just, more or less, they picked you and said, "You're a military police now"? Or, did you train for that before? Did you train to be a military policeman, or not?

Johnsrud: I was a military policeman all the time.

MacDonald: The whole time.

Johnsrud: Well, I mean, I was trained for that. But I had to put in six weeks more of training here. Otherwise I'd have been gone a long time before I did go in.



So that's when I got—the war was over, I think when we were on the boat going over. But it wasn't that good either, yet. There was a lot of Japanese soldiers that they had loaded them on the boat from all those little islands where they were, and they hauled them back and just dumped them. They didn't have no rehabilitation, whatever you call it. And, shit, you know, they just come out of the jungles and rode the boat home. Those are the guys you had to look out for because that's all they done for four years, killing GIs. And it didn't take much to fire them up, you know.

MacDonald: So you said then you went into an outfit. You became a sergeant. What type of outfit were you in at that point then?

Johnsrud: Criminal Investigation Detachment. And I got that because I had that extra training in Little Rock where I went to MP School. So they thought that I'd be a good guy to put in there. So [laughs] I didn't have nothing to do with it, but they had all the papers. That's how I got to be there. That was all right then.

MacDonald: What kind of duty did you do with that criminal investigation unit?

Johnsrud: Two of us guys had a jeep together. We had a captain, and there were seven, eight guys in the outfit. And the captain was in charge of all of us, you know. And he'd send us out, and we could go anyplace we had a pass. And if we had to go like to Yokohama or something like that, that's quite a ways from where we were at. If we had to go that far then we had a pass that we could walk into any outfit, and they had to feed us and give us a bunk to sleep. That pass was—shit, I could go anyplace in Japan with that pass. I've still got it someplace. When you showed that pass, I tell you, you got the best service.

MacDonald: It sounds like you were like an elite outfit type of thing.

Johnsrud: It was a good outfit, yeah, it was. Yeah, it was because actually at the time I didn't appreciate how much clout I had, but even the officers, when we'd come into an outfit, they almost bowed down to you because they didn't want the CID investigating their outfit. No sir, they didn't want that. Everybody had to be [laughs] on the good. So, if we showed up—that was a—was a good outfit.

MacDonald: Can you tell us what type of things you investigated?

Johnsrud: Well, one time we went into a warehouse. I don't remember what it was all about, but there was a dead Japanese floating. You could see the tide. Sometimes the water was below the doors, and then the water would come up and be maybe that high on the door. But here was a Japanese that had been killed. Him and his buddy—we had to investigate that one. Him and

his buddy were on a (??) drunk. Sake, you know. That stuff sneaks up on you like crazy. That's powerful stuff. It goes down like pop, but it's got a helluva bang. And they got drunk. Then they got in a fight on the way home. The Japanese are great to make knives. And they had these little knives with little wooden handles, but they're a flick knife in a sheath, that wooden sheath that fits over 'em. But he pulled his knife out, and he getting' a fight that guy, and he cut him just once. And the guy, well, that must've hurt like hell. He jumped in the water, and he started to swim. And why he did that nobody knows, but he did—jumped in the canal. Well, he didn't make it. We weren't really sure if he drowned. He drowned, I guess, but this was the—you get a knife out or in the gut like that, that's what made him do it, you know. He jumped in the water to get away from this guy, and he didn't make it. Well, then he floated, and he floated with the tide under the little doors. And when the tide run up, he was way back in that empty warehouse. And when you touched his clothes, the skin came off. He was rotten, you know. And we had that, all his clothes and stuff, in the office, and it stinked. There was the dirtiest stink you ever heard—smelled. But we found out afterwards that he had got in a tangle on the way home. This other guy had just cut him once. That was the end of him. And then we caught the other guy, and the other guy was only a little guy. We caught him, too, yeah. I had to guard that guy. He was only a little shit. But that's they way he defended himself. He pulled that knife when the big guy jumped him.

MacDonald: Did you have to do any investigations on the American soldiers?

Johnsrud: Well, these were American soldiers.

MacDonald: That did the knifing.

Johnsrud: Yeah. They were drunk and coming home, and then they got [unintelligible]. Oh, shit, yeah, but the Chinese were the worst ones, because they were allies of America. And more than once we'd get called out. One time we had to kick a bunch of Chinese off a Jap's boat. Japs come running to us that there were twenty-six Chinese on his boat [laughs]. They was in the Jap's boat, his boat. So we had to go in there. Took a truck along, loaded up all them Chinese, hauled them back. Their sergeant was ridiculous—great big guy that weighed about 300 pounds. Football player for one of these big, I don't know, Notre Dame or something. He was a big, big guy. He got out in front of those guys, and he had them all lined up, and, boy, he was pointing at each one, but he was talking through the interpreter, really tough talk. And the interpreter made it worse because the interpreter hated them guys anyhow. And every time the interpreter would say it, they'd straighten up [laughs]. Oh, Jesus Christ, that was something. These were a bunch of tough guys, too. I think there was twenty-six. I don't know. And we locked them all up, and then

in the morning we went down there. And there they were out there mopping the jail, happy as could be, and bowing and bowing. They weren't so tough in the morning. Yeah. That was only once. There was other times we ran into other stuff. And there were lots of GIs in order to go out and get drunk, and they'd grab a Jap girl if they'd see one walking or something. And there were rapes and all kinds of stuff like that. And we'd have to—all they could say was, "A GI." Well, there was thousands of GIs all over. How in the hell would you know which one? And we had lots of GIs locked up, too, as far as that goes. Those jails, the Jap jails, there was a bunch of cells inside it. And on the outside they were locked. Then there was a walkway, and then you had to go through another gate, and that was locked. And that's where they kept all the GIs. The Americans, when they bombed Japan, a lot of pilots, they locked them up in those jails. Well, shit, it was only six by six with one lightbulb hanging. And there was a hole in the floor. That was a toilet. You had to squat over that like a trough. There was running water through there. And that's the kind of stuff they had to—GIs, there were lots of them were prisoners over there, you know.

MacDonald: So, how long did you spend in Japan then?

Johnsrud: Well, I was over there about—over a year. I was in the Army two years. I was only in Japan probably a year. I don't know, something like that.

MacDonald: How did it come about that you got sent back to the United States then? How did you get picked to come back to the States, or did you just—time was up?

Johnsrud: Time was up. Well, you had to serve so much. I think mine was two years. So they had to get me out of there and get me home before the two years was up because I was supposed to get out at two years. I came back on a ship just like they built in Sturgeon Bay, the [unintelligible] Victory. They built a lot of Victory ships in Sturgeon Bay. And I worked on lots of those Victory ships. And this ship was built out in Maine, but it was exactly the same as what we built in Sturgeon Bay. When we were on ship I could see all the holes that I had worked in, but not on that boat but one exactly like it, because this one was built in Maine. So that was quite a ride. That was [unintelligible]. The skin on that boat wasn't very thick, either. In about a year or two, we were about 200 miles off of Alaska, coming back, and we hit some dandy squalls. And, shit, you could go way up, and you see all the sky, and then go way down and see all the water. [Laughs] That was a son of a bitch (??).

**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

MacDonald: [Tape resumes in middle of sentence] and Arnold's talking about his trip back across the Pacific Ocean after his tour of duty in Japan was over

with. And he was on a Victory ship similar to what they built here in Sturgeon Bay.

Did you get seasick?

Johnsrud: I never got seasick. And the reason I didn't get seasick was that when I first got on that boat an old guy come and grabbed me, one of the crew. And he says, "If you eat, you can keep on eating. Eat all that you can get hold of, all the time. You eat and keep your belly full, and you'll never get sick." And I did. Every time I got the chance to eat something, I would eat. And, of course, at that age I was hungry anyhow all the time. And I never got sick. No sirree, I didn't get sick.

MacDonald: What kind of mood was it when they came back across? Your boat was pretty well full?

Johnsrud: Oh, yeah. I think it was—oh, shit, I don't know.

MacDonald: What did the guys do mostly, gamble?

Johnsrud: Yes, yeah [laughs]. I could stay in my bunk. And down below there were stairways going up. And the light at night—lights were out but the only light we had was the light that came down the stairways. Then there was a big circle of light down there. And there always was a big crap game going there. And I could stay in my bunk, and I'd watch it. And boy, there's lots of—after a while I seen one guy, he had all the money on the boat. At that time he paid a guy twenty-five bucks a day, just to guard him. I mean, see that nobody jump him (??) 'cause he had all the money on the boat, and there was no place he could put it. God darn it, they went for the big stakes there. I never gambled, never did. I tried it once. I didn't have any change. I think I had a ten. I just laid it on the edge like we used to do when we played poker. You lay it on the edge, and they'd take change out. But the minute I did that, pot's open for ten bucks, one of the old timers says [Terry laughs]. That was it. That one round I lost my ten bucks. But that was a good lesson. I never played after. I played once, just that once, just that one game.

MacDonald: So, how long did it take you to come back across the ocean?

Johnsrud: Fourteen days.

MacDonald: And where did you come in port at then?

Johnsrud: I came to Seattle. See, when we went out—oh, we went out of Seattle, too, I think, yeah. But when we went out of Seattle we went down. We went straight south until we got about even—there was a big map on the

bulkhead—when we got about even with San Francisco then the boat went straight west. Well, then we could follow on that map where we were every day. And after a while there, the darned thing—well, it was—where we were going was the Philippines, that’s what it was. [Phone rings; loud clattering noises.]

Nedra J.: Now, you can take a smoke here (??).

MacDonald: Okay.

Johnsrud: Well, we was—that was a—

Nedra J.: Why don’t you just tell him why it took so long to get off the boat?

Johnsrud: [Unintelligible] Sturgeon Bay. I forgot what kind of—

MacDonald: Victory ship.

Johnsrud: Victory ship it was. [Loud clattering noises continue] It may have come off Alaska down as far as [unintelligible; loud clattering noise] side of the boat. It was like a tin can. The damn boat was—I don’t think it was a quarter inch thick. I don’t know. I don’t know how thick it was, but those waves were hitting the boat just like sledgehammers. As I said, a lot of guys were sick. I never got sick. I never did get sick. I think I made a good sailor, I don’t know.

MacDonald: When you landed in Seattle then, where did you go then from Seattle?

Johnsrud: From Seattle we went straight across Idaho and north Montana, North Dakota and then down into South Dakota and then down into Minnesota to that Army camp—it’s in Wisconsin.

MacDonald: Fort McCoy.

Johnsrud: Fort McCoy. And I got discharged there. And then I got on a train from there home a train to Green Bay. Then I got the bus from Green Bay home.

MacDonald: When you got home then, did you go to work right away? Or what took place when you got home?

Johnsrud: Supposed to be farming, but it just wasn’t very big. It was only forty acres, and I never was much of a farmer.

Nedra J.: I can [can’t?] believe that.

Johnsrud: What?

MacDonald: Did you get any veterans benefits when you got out?

Johnsrud: Well, I got twenty dollars a month, yeah, I guess it was, yeah. And that was pretty good at that time [laughs].

MacDonald: And when you were in, did your unit receive any citations or medals or anything? Did you receive anything?

Johnsrud: Well, let's see. [Loud noises continue] I got that blue one.

Nedra J.: Sixty years ago [laughs].

Johnsrud: I got that presidential Unit Citation on the sleeve (??). And I got the blue one. But that presidential citation, and I got all the ribbons for the occupation. Well, I don't know, I got quite a display, I guess [laughs].

MacDonald: When you got back again, did you join any veterans organizations right away, or not?

Johnsrud: I joined the VFW. In fact, I've been a member of the VFW for—well, I'm one of the old ones—over fifty years, maybe sixty years. I think it's sixty-some years.

MacDonald: Did your outfit ever have any reunions at all? That you served with—did they have reunions where you went and—

Johnsrud: I don't think so. I don't know.

MacDonald: Okay, couple more questions. Looking back on the military time, what do you think about it now?

Johnsrud: Well, I'm glad I went. I didn't think much of it then.

MacDonald: Right.

Johnsrud: But now I'm glad I went. How the hell would I ever get to see even California? I mean, for me that now costs lots of money, and it's a big trip. And you just don't do that on the spur of the moment. Oh, shit, I got to travel the whole length of California, and all the way up to Seattle. What the hell you know, I saw a lot of country.

Nedra J.: Did you tell them about losing your false teeth?

Johnsrud: My what?

MacDonald: Losing your false teeth.

Johnsrud: Oh, yeah, I lost a false teeth once. And then they made me a set. That Army dentist, he was no good.

Nedra J.: Well, he couldn't make a mold or anything. They had to do the best they could.

MacDonald: So when you got back, did you get married right away, or did you wait a little while?

Nedra J.: When he got back, I was in high school.

Johnsrud: I didn't get married right away, you know.

MacDonald: Okay. Can you think of anything else you'd like to say or bring up that we haven't talked about?

Nedra J.: How about waiting on the boat for the Red Cross to come? It's one of your bitching points every [laughs] time you talk about it.

Johnsrud: They get the whole bunch us, the whole shipload was supposed to unload, all the crew. But they kept us standing out there on the deck, and they found out afterwards that the Red Cross was late bringin' us donuts, and we had to stand in the god darned rain up there on the deck waiting for the god damned Red Cross to bring donuts [laughs]. Shit!

MacDonald: Okay, well Arnold, I just want to say thank you from the Veterans Museum and myself for letting me sit take the time to sit down and talk with you, okay?

Johnsrud: Oh, yeah (??).

**[End of Interview]**