

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**IRWIN PROBSTEN**  
Infantry, U.S. Army, World War II

1997

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**Irwin Probstein**, (b. 1925) Oral History Interview, 1997

User Copy: 1 audio cassettes (ca. 69 minutes) analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassettes (ca. 69 minutes) analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract:**

Irwin Probstein, a Chicago (Illinois) native, was an enlisted infantryman in the U.S. Army's 100<sup>th</sup> Division in World War II. He tells the story of his training, describing intensive and progressively long hikes in the Texas heat at Camp Wolters between lessons on the rifle and mortar ranges. During his initial contact with the Germans Probstein was shot in the lung, a wound that brought an abrupt end to his combat experience. He speaks about his experience making it back to safety after being shot, the quality of his medical care, and his attempts to reconnect with others he trained and fought with decades after the war concluded. He also talks about using the GI Bill to attend the University of Illinois, and how his study of history throughout life has underscored the honor it was for him to serve under former U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Irwin Probstein was born December 14, 1925, and grew up in the Albany Park community of Northwest Chicago (Illinois). He was drafted and entered the service in March 1944. He relocated to Madison, Wisconsin after the war, where he got married and retired in 1986.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.

Transcribed by Cassandra Kitto, 2011.

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Corrections typed in by Mary Ann Doll, 2013.

Abstract by David Hunt, 2015.

## **Interview Transcript:**

Probstein: All right, shoot!

Van Ells: Okay, today's date is January the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history over the phone this afternoon with Mr. Irwin Probstein? Probstein? How do you—

Probstein: Probstein.

Van Ells: Presently of Madison, Wisconsin and a veteran of the Second World War. Good afternoon.

Probstein: Good afternoon.

Van Ells: Thanks for taking the time out of your day.

Probstein: Well, that's certainly all right.

Van Ells: Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?

Probstein: Well, I was born in 1925, December 14<sup>th</sup> in Chicago, Illinois. Grew up there and left for service from there. And, ah—

Van Ells: What part of town did grow up in?

Probstein: Northwest side; it was called Albany Park. It's still known as that, and went to Roosevelt High School on Kimball Avenue and Wilson Avenue. Kimball runs north and south, and Wilson runs east and west. Theodore Roosevelt High School is on that corner.

Van Ells: So you were born in 1925. So at the time of Pearl Harbor you would have been in high school, I would imagine.

Probstein: That's correct. I was, ah, let's see, '41, I was sixteen years old.

Van Ells: Do you recall your reaction? As a teenager...

Probstein: Oh, yes, very much, anybody I think would. Ah, of course it was a complete surprise. You know,[laughs] I mean it was totally out of the blue because while we were very keenly aware of the war in Europe and the conditions and so forth— that was bringing in the fact that it was providing employment for people who had been out of work apparently for some years, but I was insulated from that somewhat. We didn't suffer

much in the Depression because my father was always working and brought in a fairly good amount of money, you know, we were never strapped for that. So when it was announced on Sunday afternoon, that's when I heard it, a guy by the name of Kaltenborn. He was a very well known announcer--newscaster at that time, and I think it was around noon or one o'clock or something like this. So I went over to a favorite hangout of mine at that time after dinner. Everybody seemed a little excited of course, and where I went was a little Standard Oil gas station. It was at that time just two pumps and a brick station house, and the fellow running it was very good to young kids and we got along very well. Name was John Neskin, and John shortly thereafter gave up the gas station and went to work for General Motors making electric locomotives, but there were a number of other fellows in the place who were older, and we crowded into this little area, crowded with oil cans and all kindsa stuff. It was a kinda somber mood, and it was cold; it was a cold day, and--as I recall anyway, and kinda overcast at least at that time. That's how I remember it that way, I don't know what in fact it really was like but--and the place was filled with cigarette smoke, one of the fellows for sure, and I don't remember much more than this but he had just been released from his one year of military service. When the draft went in, you know, in what was it, August or September of 1940, he had been drafted I suppose around October of '40 or November, and he'd only been home a couple of weeks, [laughs] and of course was so glad to get out, you know, be home, and here he of course knew that he'd have to go back. So it was--and I musta spent an hour or more there and then went home, and of course it being a Sunday it was on all the newscasts all the time on the radio.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: And then the next day, um, I went to school, and we had time out for President Roosevelt's speech. He made that speech about the fact that war had been declared now that they had attacked Pearl Harbor and so forth, and we all got into the assembly hall. It was a big--the assembly hall would hold pretty much the student body which was probably then twelve to fifteen hundred, all four years of school there, and, generally just a general air of excitement. And of course I was in the Junior ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] with a lot of other guys because it was a Jewish neighborhood, and we were all aware of what was going on in Germany, not in the concentration camps, but we knew of a lot of the anti-Semitism at that time, and so everybody joined the ROTC. And we had worked with Springfield rifles which were, they were called the 03. And we went through some training drills that day on firing practices, not live rounds, but practice rounds, and everybody was very excited and grim at the same time. So it was a memorable occasion, and that's a long time back, but you remember some of these things. And, of course, the headlines, the newspapers came out and big headlines and so forth. It was

a very exciting time, as I say, but also a very somber time. I mean it seemed to strike across everybody. Ah, everybody seemed to be in the same mood for, oh, a least a couple of days, and then like anything else it wore off. [laughs]

Van Ells: So you were eventually drafted when you, ah—

Probstein: Yes, yes.

Van Ells: Became of age, there.

Probstein: Yes, I was drafted the following—well, not—well, I was 18 in December of '43, and I entered service on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 1944.

Van Ells: What was your reaction when that greeting from the Selective Service came?

Probstein: Well, in my case and the case of a lot of my friends, it was something that we were not—what would you say—we were not upset about. I mean, it was something we in effect we were looking forward to. It was—

Van Ells: In what sense?

Probstein: Well, that this was our time. You know, this was something worthwhile to do. We had, ah, a great reason to do it, to enter service. Ah, not everybody quite had the same idea, but there was a general feeling—course we were 18 years old, and I think in that sense we didn't see naturally, even if we were two, three years older we would have seen things that you don't see when you're 18 but we thought at the time, my friends and I, the two or three guys that I knew, that this was important, and we had no trepidation other than it was kind of an adventurous approach, you know, just like guys that enlisted before the Civil War, you know. They were off to see the world, and that was what it was like, and so there was not—there was a counter theme of behavior. I don't know how to express it exactly, but the funny part was, you know, now you look back, how World War II veterans in general are being generalized, sort of lumped together, and all this heroic status now, you know I think I remember when Ambrose, Steven Ambrose, was here, and he's done this several times, maybe he does this a lot but, he was giving a talk--that was the one that, ah, the series that the Veterans Museum put on, that Zeitlin, you know, Dick put on.

Van Ells: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Probstein: He came, and he talked, and he asked those who were in the audience who were World War II veterans to please rise, you know [laughs], and I

thought to myself—the reason I laugh, and find it humorous was that overlaid over all of this, ah, is my recollection very clearly of the efforts and concerns that guys had going in it. They didn't wanna go, you know, despite the war, and they were looking for angles all the time. I mean, the people that I remember, particularly my sister, who is four years older, her friends, you know, she had a boyfriend, eventually married, but that group, you know, they were all saying, ah, they went into various programs which would delay entry to service, like, not ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program]. I don't know if you're familiar with that—

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Okay, not ASTP, but it was something like—I don't know what it was, but there was something you could join, and a lot of guys did.

Van Ells: The Enlisted Reserve Corps I think is what you're talking about.

Probstein: Something like that. I don't recall that at all. I don't know what that was all about, but there were a lotta guys [laughs], you know, finding any way that they could delay the inevitable, and, as I say, the humor in this now is you look back, and, you know, everybody's put on the same plane that here are all these great heroes that went off to fight this war when, you know, my recollection would be at least 30 to 40 percent were dragged kicking and screaming. But that isn't to say, though, that they didn't do what they're—their job.

Van Ells: Right. No, I understand.

Probstein: I think they were something on the order of— I don't know if you're familiar with the character of Max Klinger on—

Van Ells: Right, oh yeah.

Probstein: Well, Max Klinger to me, whoever designed--wrote, that thing [*MASH*; book, movie, TV series] had a tremendous insight into the mentality, the mental processes of the average GI in World War II, and so did Bill Mauldin. If you look at his cartoons I think you will find I think the true--a kind of a truth there about how it was for certain--for those in the infantry anyway, particularly and especially, because that's what he drew his cartoons about.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: So, that's my recollection of that aspect.

Van Ells: Um, why don't you just walk me through your entry into the military service, you know, from the recruiting—not the recruiting station, the induction station to the basic training and that sort of thing?

Probstein: Oh, my dad – well, yeah, I remember this. We had to report early to the draft board. It was known—[laughs] the draft board was known as the “Lightening 59<sup>th</sup>” you know, which gives you a clue to what I was saying earlier –

Van Ells: Why's that?

Probstein: You know what I mean. Well anyhow, it was three months before I was drafted and all. Anyway it was in the morning, it was March 17<sup>th</sup>, and there was never much of an issue or a thing about Saint Patrick's Day, so there was no particular celebration or festivity connected with that at all. It was just like another day, and we went in there and there must have been, oh I'd say, I can't recall for sure, but I'd say at least 15 or 20 of us from the 59<sup>th</sup>. And then we got on a street car, Montrose Avenue street car, and went eastbound downtown—or not downtown-- to an area known as Uptown Chicago. I think in that area. I think that's where it was. And, ah, there – this is very near the lake, Lake Michigan – and there we got into another big like building it was, and we joined then another – groups of other guys coming in from all over the city I guess. I don't recall what it was, but we went into a big room, and like I say, at least 100 guys were in this room, and most of them, I'd say 80 percent were 18. Maybe there was a scattering of fellows who were a little older, like 25 or even 30, and, how that happened I have no idea except there were deferments for various reasons, but the majority were my age. And then a sergeant got up in front of the group, and it was a well lit room. It was a nice – it wasn't a sunny day, but sort of overcast day, in a big room, and he just called us to attention, not in a military, but just to say I want your attention now, and, “You're gonna take the oath.” And, um, he pressed upon us that when you take this oath, now, you're in the Army, you see. This is it. And, ah, he made the comment that, “Those of you who are regular church goers and so on, you remember this, God may have your soul, but as soon as you take this oath the Army has your ass.” [laughs] And that was the way it went. So, ah, we took the oath, and then we filed out and took the North Shore, which was a special addition — you know, Chicago has elevated service, train service, but the North Shore Railroad ran from Chicago, downtown Chicago, all the way north to Great Lakes and Milwaukee, and along the way was Fort Sheridan, so that's how we got to Fort Sheridan, on the North Shore. We got off the train and there was Fort Sheridan. We sort of streamed across the road and entered the fort grounds itself. I guess there were noncoms around who sorta steered us into another processing, the whole process, but we got to barracks, and our names and all that was done, and by this time it was supper. It was late in the afternoon, 4 or 5

o'clock, so we had supper that night, and, ah, that was it really, till the next morning when we were woken by a tinny little box out of which a loud speaker came reveille, first reveille I ever heard. And a course we went to breakfast, and we spent the day taking tests, and sometime I think later in the day it musta been, ah, we started drawing our uniforms and stuff. Oh, we also got haircuts that second day, a GI cut which was you just take the razor and run it over your hair. It's quite close, so you don't have much hair left standing up. And, ah, then you drew your equipment, we drew equipment. That would be day two. Day three I don't recall vaguely about it, but somewhere around the fourth day, it would have been, we were what they called "Bingoed." B-I-N-G-O, you know, like Bingo, you know, win Bingo.

Van Ells: Mm.

Probstein: You're number – a whole bunch of us had a certain number, and when that number was called a sergeant came into the barracks and said "Well, number so and so, outside." So, a whole bunch of us filed out, got on-- with our stuff and got on a train, and we spent the rest of that day, let's say the afternoon and evening, overnight and the next day, that'd be day two, full day on the train, and the morning of the third day, around noon--well, just before noon, say about 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, we arrived at what was known then as Camp Wolters, Texas. That's a Fort now, it's been moved up to a Fort status, but it was an infantry replacement training center, and that's where, a few days later we began our training cycle which was 17 weeks. And—

Van Ells: And that training consisted of what? I mean, how much of that was on the rifle range, how much of that was just drill and that type of thing?

Probstein: You've not heard anybody tell you this before?

Van Ells: I'm interested in your story.

Probstein: Okay [laughs].

Van Ells: Actually, they're more different then you might think.

Probstein: Pardon?

Van Ells: They're more different than you might think.

Probstein: Are you? Well, that's interesting. Well, this was--from hindsight, ah, I have to say that I was extremely well organized. In my view, in my experience, as I look back on it, during the time then, and now, ah, every moment was accounted for. It was not brutal or overbearing in any way,



ah, at least the way we were treated. Discipline was very clearly marked out, in the sense that, what I mean by that is, you were now going to be doing what you were being told to do when you were told to do it, and that's it. You know what I mean?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Well, it was kind of a, not veiled, but it was like, you know, there's no need to go into any histrionics here. You're in the Army, you're gonna do what we tell you to do, and that's it, that's the way life is now. And, ah, it was a fairly strenuous 17 weeks. We got a rifle--actually went on the rifle range. At about the fifth or sixth week we began to get rifle instruction for real. That was—they told us about—each of us—we had our—you were issued an M1 right away, the very first day, and then we went through, excuse me [coughing], a certain amount of close order drill. Not very much at this point but just enough, you know left face, right, how to fall in, how to fall out, what squad you were in, and the basics of where you went and what you were to do, and who your squad leader was. And squad leaders were appointed out of the group of us; there was no—no one was added in, no one came in. And, ah, the way they worked, which we took a few weeks to figure out, but the noncoms who did 90 percent of the training, they lived in the barracks with us, but they also worked two shifts. In other words there was a morning shift from reveille to about noon, two or three sergeants in our platoon alone, you follow me?

Van Ells: Mmhm.

Probstein: Then after lunch, whether this was in the field, or wherever this was, after lunch those two or three guys, whoever they were, they disappeared and another two or three guys came. You see?

Van Ells: Mmhm.

Probstein: They were fresh and not that all worn out and so forth. So they kept up the pace, you might say. There was no slacking off in terms of what we were—at the rate of which we were doing things. And after we progressed through the M1, that is to learn how to sight the rifle, there was some dry run exercises right there in the company area. And then we went. I think it was about the sixth week, we went actually on the range. And of course everywhere you went, no matter what we did, you carried a full field pack and a canteen and, um, we interspersed with all this for various hikes. The first hike we took was, as I recall, a five mile hike. And that was done with what they call a combat pack. In other words you took the roll off. I don't know if you're familiar with that kind of gear that we had—

Van Ells: No.

Probstein: But, you had like a roll which was made up of a shelter half, a half of a tent.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Probstein: And inside that you folded a blanket, and inside the blanket was a two or three piece wooden pole maybe two feet, two and a half feet high when it was put together, and the other guy, your buddy, would have the same thing. So you would have space to crawl around in this little pup tent, you know. Well anyway, we never got to use that till much later, but that was part—and then you had some stakes which you pounded in, so that was part of the roll. So you had the blanket, the tent pole, stakes, the shelter half itself, and mess kit which went on the outside. It was on a flat-like. That's the best way I could explain it, on the outside, and a bayonet carrier was attached to that. You carried your bayonet in that carrier. You carried your rifle. You had your canteen on your belt. You were issued a belt. I don't remember to—oh, it was a pouch, ammunition, with four or five pouches for a clip of ammunition to go in each of those pouches. And then on one hip, the right hip was your canteen, and on the left hip was a first aid pack. And then you carried this wherever you went, and after that first five miler was with this light pack, you took the roll off and you just had a mess kit and a bayonet carrier, and that was it. Then after that we – I think the next hike we took that stands out was a seven miler, and that was with the full roll from that point on. And then we did seven, nine, twelves, we did a lot of these things. I don't know, when I say a lot, I'm just saying that's what we did a lot of. And, ah, we did a seven mile speed march before breakfast on one occasion after about the eighth week. See, they were toughening us up in a gradual way, really.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: It was very precise, very well thought out. So then, with the rifle training, when you went on the M1 range it was a whole week. I think it was about five days that we spent there, and there was a lot of instruction, and it was done. Then the squad was split into six two-man teams. They used the coach in pupil method. You probably heard this before, but they used the coach and pupil method. And what—you didn't know any more—the coach didn't know anymore than the pupil, but you were instructed by the range master or whoever was running this thing. And you knew by now how to open the breach of the rifle and how to put in a full clip of ammunition, but on the range you didn't use a full clip. You used single shot, that is individual shells. And then you went through various distances. I think we started out at maybe two hundred yards, went up to five hundred. And, um, I don't know what day of this, but it had to be like the third or fourth or fifth day, you qualified. In other words, your scores

on the range counted, and the higher your score of course—basic, or the first level was I think just not marksman but rifleman or something like that, and then it went up from there. So that if you were really good and could hit a couple of bulls-eyes at three hundred or five hundred yards, especially, you got like expert. Although I don't remember any expert badges being given, but I remember everybody got a qualification thing. And, ah, I don't remember how those scores were computed, but I mean you had to hit so many in the target, so many of 'em and each one counted a certain amount. Like the bulls-eye itself was, let's say, it might be a 10, and the ring around it might be a nine and so on so. And then when they counted these—and you took turns, too, on the other end whether it was raising the targets up and bringing 'em down and patching 'em up and then you'd call in the results of that. You know, "They're two fives, two nines", whatever it was. And somebody, I think an NCO [non-commissioned officer], a noncom, again a lotta noncoms, did all this computing, you know [laughs], kept score. Then from there with the hiking of various distances, we went out an awful lot at night. We spent an awful lotta time at night. In other words we went through various drills all day long, and then after chow in the evening we would have a night problem. Sometimes this was just, I don't recall, it would be like a route march at night. We'd get to a certain place, and we'd see a demonstration, say, of some kind with some weapons, maybe artillery or something like this.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Probstein: I'm not--you know, this is kind of vague now, but, I remember that, but it was a lot of night work, and course you got very, very tired and then there were a lot lectures during the day, during the afternoon, so naturally you always wore your helmet liner, see. That was like a plastic thing, and I don't know--you're familiar with the World War II type helmet?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Used in Korea and so forth and Vietnam even. Well anyway, inside that is a liner, and that's we wore. You wore the steel helmet a lot about the last two, three weeks. Then you wore a steel helmet, I think, it seemed to me, every day. But anyhow, the NCOs would walk around during the lecture, and they'd have a handful of stones because guys would nod off, see, and they'd wait for some guy to nod off, and then they'd throw a stone and hit him in the helmet with it. This was not punitive in that sense. It wasn't particularly harsh. It just had a sharp ring to it [laughs].

Van Ells: Yeah, gets your attention.

Probstein: It'd go, "Crack!" [laughs] What?

Van Ells: Gets your attention.

Probstein: Yeah. [laughs] You'd wake up and come out of it. Well, that was the whole idea. It wasn't benevolent by any means. I don't mean to give that impression, but you know it was one of those things.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Probstein: And then they would set off, ah, when they got tired of using stones — inside was stones, usually. Outside if we were had a lecture on something, whatever it would be — outside, in the field, we would march out to some place, doing something, and we'd have the same thing. Well then they would set off charges, you know, explosions, ah, quite near. So then after a lot of this that I'm describing, we went through other kinds of drills. We went through learning how to use a 60mm mortar. We spent about a week or more on that, the same thing with the 30 caliber machine gun, and of course we had a dry walk hike. These ranges that I'm talking about, mortar range, machine gun range, and so forth, were out quite a ways, I mean that wasn't around the corner. You went out maybe, six, eight, ten miles to these places.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: You see, and then you had to hike back in. Well, anyhow—and then we would have the noon meal out there. One thing that struck me during this time that I noticed as we went through the training — that I — of course I'm a great admirer, later in life, of George Marshall. I never knew who he was except I knew he was chief of staff, that's all we knew.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Probstein: But one of the things that struck me, and I don't know about other guys, but when we would line up for chow, you see, no matter what the weather, no matter what the circumstances, the enlisted men, not the NCOs, but the enlisted men went first. We formed up first and went in the line. How we got in the line, you know how fast you got in or where you were, that's your problem, but we got in the line, and the NCOs and the officers stood to one side and watched us get our meal. Once the line, the company personnel had gone through, then the NCOs would go through. When the NCOs got their meal as they were going through, then the officers ate, but not before, not till every man in the company, NCOs included, was sitting on the ground or wherever, shoveling away, then the officers would line up and get their meal. Ah, I thought that was interesting at the time, and I still think it was impressive in one respect that the officers had of course a

kind of a built in, what would you say, a kind of built in awareness that the men had to be taken care of first, and, ah, I thought that was pretty good.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: So—go ahead.

Van Ells: I was gonna ask, during this training period, were there very many people who dropped out?

Probstein: No, not very many at all. There was one rather dramatic thing that happened. As we were starting out with this full field equipment, and just getting used to things, it was — you know how anything else that's new, you don't know what you're doing half the time, you're learning and so forth. Well anyhow, we were taking some of our first hikes, and there was one guy who obviously was pretty — I don't know if he had tuberculosis or what he had, but he just wasn't a healthy individual, and he was perhaps 25 to 30 years old. I think this was almost on the first hike that we took, that I remember anyway, he fell out, or fell down really, just dropped out. Until that point I had never seen anything approaching real violence in my life, but one of the NCOs marching along beside us on the road there, ran over to this guy — it happened ahead of me, that's how I remember all of this. I wasn't looking back, I was looking ahead, and we were moving along at a pretty good clip. When you move at 120 steps a minute it's a lot faster than you think. But this happened, like, you know, a couple hundred yards up the road. This guy fell out, fell out, just dropped out, and this sergeant just ran over to him, and I don't remember, you know, the details. I just remember this, what I'm telling you, he ran over to this guy, and I remember him yelling and picking this guy up by the front of his fatigue jacket. That's what we wore. We wore a fatigue. That was the uniform, was fatigues. He picked this guy up and was yelling at him and his year [??] was pretty blue, about that he was gonna march, you know, with the rest of us, and if he was trying to dog it, or whatever, um, they would drag him along, and that's what they did. They put a rope around this guy and they dragged him along till the ambulance came. I don't know how long I'm talking about, maybe half an hour. But I'd never seen anything like this before in my life, and that was a shock, and when the ambulance came they checked the guy over again, I guess. Somebody musta got the ambulance to come, and they put him on a litter and took him away and he never came back. That's the only guy that I recall. Other than that, I don't think anybody dropped out. It was—partly I think, well mainly maybe was, too, that we were all, you know, in pretty good shape.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Really, we were not athletes in that sense, you know what I mean, we weren't conditioned when we got there, but generally speaking everybody was in basically very good health.

Van Ells: Yeah, which helps.

Probstein: Oh, yeah, oh, 'cause it got hotter than blazes. You know, Texas gets awful hot. After about May it gets really hot, and you're out there literally so hot you can't kneel down on the ground. Like we had an exercise of searching for mines. That's part of the training – how you would deactivate a mine, and to do that you get down on your hands and knees, and you use your bayonet and you probe the ground in front of you. Well, it was so hot then that you did it on one knee at a time [laughs] because the fabric of the fatigue was very thin of course, and that ground was very, very hot. I remember that and the steel helmet being very, very hot, and of course, being very thirsty a lot of the time. So to counteract that, what I did is, ah, I got addicted to Doublemint Gum. And so, if you chewed Doublemint gum and you had this warm water in your canteen it tasted cooler, see, but, ah, it really wasn't, but anyhow, that's what I recall.

Van Ells: So, how long was it between basic training and the time they sent you overseas? 'Cause the war's in high gear here.

Probstein: Oh yes, yes.

Van Ells: I'm just wondering what the timeline was here.

Probstein: Yeah, the timeline went this way: after basic ended, 17 weeks, there was a Saturday and a Sunday, and then I think I got a 10 day, what they call "delay in route" from Camp Walters to Chicago to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where I was assigned to the 100<sup>th</sup> Division. I got there about the fifth of August, I guess it would be. Fourth of August? I don't know. And we shipped out--the division moved out, sailed out of New York. It was about the fourteenth of October, and we arrived in Marseille [France] I think. Now, it's, you know, a day or two either way, ah, the twenty-fourth of October. And then we spent a week getting equipment, unloading. We did our own unloading for the most part, too, of the ships that we came—we came in on—most of us—well, I guess our whole regiment came in on one boat, one ship, the *George Washington*, and, ah, the division, as I found out later, the division got to online or inline on the first of November, the one regiment, and then the next regiment got online or got in about two or three days, four days, five days after that; fifth, sixth, seventh. We went in at about the twelfth of November. So that's the timeline on that.

Van Ells: Yeah. And so when you get off the ship, what happened? I mean, what do you do to set up and—

Probstein: Oh, geez, you mean when we unloaded [laughs]?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: [laughs] Ha, ha! That's a story in itself. Well, we got to Marseille, that's a beautiful harbor. It's really striking if you're on the deck and so on—we got there, must have been around noon, and we spent from noon till, I'd say 6 or 7 o'clock at night before we got ashore at what was known as, at least as I recall, was known as Callahan Beach. Now why, I don't know, and the harbor when we stalled [stealed ?] in was a beautiful sight because it goes up into not mountains exactly, but the harbor itself was filled with scuttled ships of all kinds, I guess. We couldn't tell, but you could see bows and sterns sticking up in the water and so forth. Anyway, we got in there, we unloaded by LST [Landing Ship, Tank] or whatever, and then when we got on the beach, ah, we were loaded down. We had, in addition to the roll I described to you, we also had an extra blanket roll on the equipment that we were carrying, so it was a little heavier. But we must have hiked from there all night, ah—oh, by the way, the infantry at that time had a general rule that you would hike about fifty minutes to an hour, and then you took a ten minute break. This was, as I understand, that was the same formula that Stonewall Jackson used in the valley, until he was—during the Civil War, but that's what we did. So we kept going, and we kept going. I'm telling you, I don't know where we went through Marseille, but we got out of Marseille, we were aware of that, but we got out of Marseille on this road. It seemed like it had no end. It seemed to me that we must have marched 100 miles, but I don't think it was--it probably was closer to 15. I'd say 12 to 15 miles, maybe a little more, and, ah, we just got to a point when—and pitch dark— and that's another thing, you know, working in the dark, it's wild. So then you just get this order that, well okay, fall out, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon fall out here, you can't see where you're at. We were in a big field it turned out the next morning, and what we did was open our packs and take out this, ah, extra roll that we had on it, and we took out our shelter half, and each person made his own individual bed at that point. You just put down your shelter half, put your blanket over you, and that was it. We woke up, it was raining [laughs], and it was about 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, and it was muddy, and it was just miserable, but, ah--so that was the first day there. We were out in some little town, ah, I forget, a little suburb of Marseille, and we stayed there I don't think more than three/four days. We did get a half a day pass into Marseille to see the city a little bit and run around the dock area and so on. Then we loaded up on the fourth or fifth day and we spent Halloween night, I remember that, in a town called, let's see, in Dijon, in a big, big park, like a forest preserve. And then the last town we left, big town, was Épinal.

From Épinal we went into this whole series of towns of Vosges Mountains that had these little towns: Lunéville, Baccarat, and so on, and that's where we wound up.

Van Ells: Yeah. You're getting into the Alsace-Lorraine region.

Probstein: Oh yes, yes. That's where, as far as—that's right. Mm-hm.

Van Ells: And so when did you first have contact with the Germans?

Probstein: That was--it on the twelfth of November, and that was the end of the war for me because in the morning we made this big attack, and then we were shelled. We had casualties in the morning, and then we pushed on in the late afternoon, and then we got into a big—see, the Vosges is a very, very heavy; you can't see anything. The only way you found anything out was when someone shot back at you, and that's what happened, and we had a lot of casualties in the afternoon, and I was of course one of them, and that was the end of the war for me.

Van Ells: And so you got to the line and were injured and brought back within the course of a couple days.

Probstein: Yes, well, yeah, we were in reserve maybe no more than a week.

Van Ells: While you're in reserve, what exactly is it that you're doing?

Probstein: Oh, nothing much. Well, we dug in; you always dig in. Um—

Van Ells: And, and so your purpose is to, ah, sort of lay in the back and move up when you're needed?

Probstein: That's right, that's right.

Van Ells: Okay. What goes through your mind at this time? It sounds nerve-racking.

Probstein: Ah, not very much. We were just, um, how shall I say, we were cold. We were wet. We were hungry most of the time [laughs]. Ah, not that we weren't being fed properly. I don't mean that. We were; we were fed very well. We were on rations, K-rations, but, you know, we also had a hot meal every day. And ah, we looked to our equipment. Everybody was cleaning his rifle or that kind of thing. And we didn't have many formations at all. We just dug in, and you kind of socialized. There was really not much else to do.

Van Ells: Yeah.



Probstein: Just laying there and waiting. We could hear artillery fire at times, at night and during the day, but we really didn't know what was going on, and you never do. The war is a very personal thing in that regard. It's just what happens right around you. And, um--when I, many years later, well probably in 1994--well no, it was 1952. One of the fellows who was in my platoon came through Chicago, gave me a call, he was working in Washington D.C. as an attorney, and he visited me after— that's right, wait a minute. He visited me in December of '45, and he had gone through most of it. He had been out for about a month, twenty-eight days with trench foot, and then he went back, and he'd been slightly wounded the first day I—the day I'm talking about he was slightly wounded, and ah, he said the day after that he went back and then had this trench foot thing, and that was about it, I mean, as far as that goes. He said that I hadn't missed [laughs] anything. But one of the things I didn't know, there was a fellow in my squad—well, there was several but um, that I got to know fairly well. I have a company roster now. It took a whole while, but anyway we got in touch in '94 again, after 1952. Then in 1954 [1994?], I talked to this guy again; 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, that kind of thing, you see, and, ah, we filled in a lot of gaps, and he told me a lot of things that I didn't know about like that we had a newspaper, an association, 100<sup>th</sup> Division Association. So I've joined that and every four months or so we get a newsletter, a pretty nice one. Then one day after that, we first talked about a month later I think it was, he called me and he said, "I want you to speak to someone," and I got on the phone, and it was our platoon leader. He was visiting in Washington on business or something. He lives in Greece, he's a Greek fellow, and lived in Greece most of his life after the war. So, it was – and there's another guy living in southern Illinois that I've exchanged letters with and has sent me a — well, kind of a handwritten — well it's not handwritten, typewritten recollection of his experience. He didn't get a scratch. He went from — went all the way through and he got hepatitis or jaundice the last week of the war; he got jaundice. Other than that, he never got a scratch. And, ah, he wrote all this up, and I have a copy of it, and I have a xeroxed copy of the division history as well. So I went through the roster and, ah, I knew of a couple guys that I knew that I considered like buddies, friends, ah, that had gotten killed that same day, or the next morning, really. I had gotten out of there, oh, about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning before I got out, was lifted out of there, and then, I think a couple hours after that there was an artillery barrage, and it killed our weapons platoon leader who was sheltering a guy who had been wounded. He threw his body over him, and he got killed. And then this other fellow that I met in basic, he was killed right after that. So, then when I went over the list I saw another name that I had never realized before who was killed later in the war, and, ah, that really hit kinda hard, you know, 50 years later, and, ah, you see this name, and you realize the guy is gone all this time, and in my mind I never realized that. When I talked with this first fellow that I mentioned, helped me get outta there,

helped me on the litter with the litter team to get me out of this place because it was pretty rugged going we never mentioned— well, one other individual that is living I went through basic with him. He lives in Chicago. He's a machinist, way southeast Chicago, and I talked with him. I called him on the phone, and we had a nice little talk, and, ah, it was very, to my way of thinking for me, it was very emotional, it was very moving because of that, I don't know what goes into that, but, ah, we had a real good talk and I really got a lot out of that.

Van Ells: Mm. If you can, why don't you just describe to me the incident in which you were wounded and what you remember about it, if anything.

Probstein: Oh. Well—oh, yes, well—

Van Ells: Because some guys don't.

Probstein: Oh, really? Well, in this case—

Van Ells: Well, you know, the trauma on that sort of thing can sometimes—

Probstein: Yeah.

Van Ells: People blackout on that sort of thing.

Probstein: Oh, well no. This was a different story there. After the morning, see, well, the guy—we had a couple of casualties in my squad. One that I recall specifically, right away in the morning we got the shelling, and this guy got hit in the ankle or something. He carried the automatic rifle, and, ah—in fact I'm trying to track him down now, still, on my computer. I found out originally he comes from Sodus, New York, but I didn't know that. Know it now, and I'm trying to get in touch with people. I sent a letter. So, anyway, ah, after that we laid there for about another half hour, and then we moved off. Again, it's hard to describe the vegetation, but it was extremely heavy, and, ah, when you moved off like that, as I call it, you couldn't see really very much ahead of you. We had to stay very close to one another otherwise you'd get lost. You'd just wind up nowhere. So, anyhow, we kept plunging along, and we came to an opening that we could see a great distance, not forest, it was just open ground, oh for, it looked to me to the horizon. Well, from where we were to the horizon, is what? A mile or so?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Ah, open land, and we dug in along that ridge, like a little ridgeline. We dug in there, and we stayed there for a couple hours, seemed to me. And the next thing was, the word came down, in my squad anyway, everybody

two man—you know, everybody broke up into two man groups, and the word came down from one foxhole to the other, “We’re movin’ out.” So we jumped up, and we got up to our squad leader, and in our squad was a guy who had been with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in North Africa; he had been wounded, reclassified, and returned to the infantry. I understand he was wounded later, but the word that I got was, it was self inflicted probably, at least a suspicious wound [laughs]. But anyhow, his name was Hemmingway, and he was tough as a cob. This guy, I mean really, he was really a tough—he was our platoon sergeant. And, ah, I don’t know, I’ll get to this point. Do you wanna know this or not?

Van Ells: Sure.

Probstein: You tell me now—

Van Ells: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Probstein: He was our platoon sergeant, and we had a guy in my squad who was—

[break in recording][**End of Tape 1, Side A**]

[inaudible] referred to him, and he was kind of an alcoholic. Well, one night shortly before we shipped out of Bragg, Fort Bragg, Injun Joe came staggering in. It was a Saturday night of all things, and he kept a case of beer under his cot, which was not particularly GI, but he got away with it. And, ah, he was lights out, you know, and he’s sort of carrying on, and sorta singing. Nobody minded, you know, no one was upset, but Hemingway came storming out of his— you know the NCOs lived in rooms off the main barracks, you know.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: I don’t know if you know or are familiar how barracks were built then. But anyway, he came storming out, turned the lights on, and, I don’t know, said a number of things. He was swearing at this guy, and I guess they knew each other fairly well. Anyway, he hauled off and popped this guy right on, just hit him right on the jaw – smack! And poor old Injun Joe flew through the air about four or five feet and hit up against the barracks wall. If he had hit a window [laughs], he woulda gone out that window and fallen, you know, what, 15 feet. Well, you know it’s very vague in a sense, but actually, he was busted for that, see, and I don’t remember any real talk, you know, how it would be gossip, and so, you know, “Hemingway got busted!” No, it was just one of those things. He just got busted, and then here he was in our squad, and so our squad leader, who was a real nice guy, and I’ve been trying very hard to find any trace of him, and it’s very difficult. He got a battlefield commission about a month

or so after we were there, as I understand it, and his name was Jim Gore. And there we were huddling around our squad leader because he had stopped, you know, realizing that we were lost, that somehow we had lost contact with the rest of the platoon. So he turned to Hemingway and he said, “Well Lyle,” he called him by his first name, he said, “Well Lyle, what should we do?” He said, “You know we’ve lost contact,” and Lyle says, “Push. Just keep going.” [laughs] So that’s what we did. And we got to a fire lane; you know how they cut lanes in the woods for fires—

Van Ells: Right.

Probstein: Well, we got to a fire lane, and just as we did we heard a lot— you can tell an M1 right away. We heard an M1 firing, we heard a machine gun firing, and so our squad leader, Jim Gore, he just said, “Well, follow me, let’s go. Let’s go where the guns are. Napoleon.” So we go roaring off there, and as we got up to the--apparently, we couldn’t tell anything, but as we got up to the scene there was just all kinds of things happening, and the next thing I knew I was just knocked back about 10 feet it seemed to me, blood out of my mouth and the whole business, and I realized I was in tough shape, and, ah, I just went down, after staggering around a bit and fell down and stayed there. Someone, I don’t know who it was next to me, close to me, asked me if I was hit. I said, “Yeah,” and he said, “Hold on, we’ll get the medic.” So then the medic came, and he put a patch on my chest. I had a chest wound. It went through the arm, through the lung, and out. And he put a patch on it and, ah, taped it, I think, and then they carried me back, and I said, “Well, I can walk,” you know, and I tried walking, and I couldn’t and I knew my legs were all right, but I guess the shock and everything, and of course I found out later the lung had collapsed and so forth. Anyway, we got some place, and we bedded down, we dug in again. I couldn’t do anything, but they just laid me down, and this platoon leader that I told you that threw himself on another guy and got killed, he was next to me. I guess I musta passed out for a while because when I came to I was terribly thirsty, and I must have moved around a little bit, and this lieutenant, his name was Morane [Moraz,sp?], something like that, I can’t get you the spelling, real, real fine person. It’s always the case, you know. And he said, “How you doing?” And I said, “I’m just thirsty,” and he said, “Okay, you got your canteen?” I said, “No, I think they took everything.” So, he cut off a branch of a tree, you know, they were mostly, what would you say, conifers or fir like trees in that woods, as I remember it anyway, and I chewed on that because it was snowy, and icy, and sleety, you know, weather, and so it was wet, and it was cold and it tasted great, and I chewed on that. And, ah, then, oh, I don’t know, finally a litter team came, two guys, and then they got me on the litter, and then they started back, and then this one guy that I told you that called me in Chicago, he was with us, and another guy who was slightly wounded was with me. There were four—two, four and me was five. We’re walking through, and of

course, it was very difficult going. They couldn't see where they were going. I fell off the litter twice, you know [laughs], because they dropped the litter. It was steep going, and so I'd get back on the litter, and I'd had a couple shots, I guess, of morphine, so I didn't feel much pain, and then through the battalion aid station where they dressed it a little—there wasn't much to dress, it was just an opening where the bullet had come out and a little opening where the bullet had gone in. So, then you just went from battalion to regiment to division, what they called a division collecting station. Then I went to an evacuation hospital, and then to, ah, I think it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital, which was near Épinal, and from there to Marseille to a hospital, and then to Fitzsimons General, and then to, ah, O'Reilly, yeah, O'Reilly General Hospital in Springfield, Missouri, and that's where I was discharged.

Van Ells: And you spent how long in the hospitals?

Probstein: Well, from that time until I was discharged; from that point until the middle of August of '45. I was up and ambulant after about—of course that was one of the things, they didn't get you out of bed like they do now. You just laid there, but the care—I think one of the things that I would say for posterity, the care we got was exemplary. I think it was marvelous. I think that the nurses should get just all kinds a credit. I don't know what I can say about that. They were terribly devoted, hard working. They worked 12-hour shifts.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Probstein: For the most part, and, ah, those nurses were just something else. Really, they — I don't know. Words fail me. I can't describe it, but whatever it was, they were there, and they were very attentive. I don't know, just all the way around. It made the whole difference I think in everything. And of course the physicians, the doctors were first class. They were very personable, they were supportive, warm, you know, much different than you — I don't know how you relate to your own doctor today, but totally different at that time. The only time I saw anything like that was when I was at O'Reilly General. We used to have a — a ward surgeon would come through every day because we were getting ready either to ship out or you know, then, when the war ended the middle of August, why, you know, everybody was going home anyhow, but, ah, this one surgeon came down the ward and was checkin' people, and the guy next to me was complaining about his ankle or something that hurt, and this doctor had done the surgery. He said, "There can't be anything wrong in there," he said, "I did the surgery, whatever it is, should be fine." He says, "No, I'm telling you: It hurts." So they got into an argument, and, ah, the doctor lost his temper, and he said to the nurse, "Put this man on a gurney, and take him [laughs] to the operating room. I'm gonna open that thing up right

now.” So, later in the day he came back and he apologized to this fellow. He was coming out of the ether, you know, he said, “You were right, I was wrong. There was an infection in there. I’m sorry.” So, ah, but I think the whole atmosphere and whatnot of the military hospitals was just great, you know what I mean. They just did everything they could to help you.

Van Ells: Um, so you were eventually discharged then?

Probstein: Yes, right.

Van Ells: And when you got out what were your priorities in life? What was the main thing that you wanted to do? What did you want to do first, that sort of thing?

Probstein: Well, ah, go to college. I went down to University of Illinois. That seemed to be important at the time. I think it was a mistake, myself.

Van Ells: Why is that?

Probstein: I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. And I found out 30 years too late [laughs]. I would have loved to have gone into history, but, ah, one thing led to another, you know, a whole lifetime story, but anyway, I got out and graduated, and so forth.

Van Ells: What did you major in, and what did you do?

Probstein: In psychology, and I didn’t know what I was gonna do with it, and sort of lot of dead end sorts of things, and then I got into social work as a probation officer with the juvenile court, and then went and got a masters in social work, and worked for the VA [Veterans Affairs] for three years, and then came here to Madison, Central Wisconsin Colony. Now it’s known as Central Wisconsin Center.

Van Ells: And when was that?

Probstein: That was in October of ’59. I got my masters in ’56 and worked for the VA till ’59, came here, got married, came here, and, ah, stayed with the state, not there, but I mean in state civil service till 1985.

Van Ells: Right.

Probstein: 1986. I retired in ’86.

Van Ells: I wanna go back to the college years ‘cause one of the more famous aspects of the post-World War II periods in the veterans was the GI bill, and I am wondering if that played any role in your decision to go to

college. Would you have gone had it not been for that? As you say, perhaps you went too early, did that perhaps lure you to college prematurely or, just your thoughts on the GI bill.

Probstein: Yeah, right, I think you put it in very good terms. I think that's right. Everybody was going, you know what I mean [laughs].

Van Ells: So you were doing what everyone else was doing?

Probstein: Exactly, and not giving it a great deal of thought at the time as to where I was going, you know. But um, I found out later, of course, some guys didn't do anything for a year, which is probably what would have been a good idea. They joined the "52-20 Club", you know, where you got twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks.

Van Ells: Right.

Probstein: Not all of them stayed the whole year. Also there was a junior college in Chicago, a series of, a number of them, and coulda gone there, but I don't know, it's just one of those things. That's the way it goes.

Van Ells: Yeah. And so, what was campus like in Champaign [Illinois]? I imagine it was filled with vets.

Probstein: Well, in the fall of '45 it was just before the onrush which came in the following semester. Then everything, you know, just bulged up. I mean that place was loaded with GIs who were just starting, like myself, some guys who were coming back after they left as, say, sophomores or juniors. They came back for a year or two and graduated of course. Ah, so, it was a mix of people, but the majority, it seemed to me, were older, that is they were students who were previously there and returning to finish, and most of them didn't seem to have more than a couple of years to go. But that's just an overview in my own mind. I really don't know for sure.

Van Ells: Yeah. Once you finished school did you have trouble finding work?

Probstein: Ah, yes and no.

Van Ells: Yes and no.

Probstein: Ah, it just didn't--I don't know, I just couldn't do anything, find anything I really liked until I got into social work, and that was a couple of years after. Let's see, '48, '49, '50. Yeah, '50, I got into social work in '50 with Cook County [Illinois]. It was a little section devoted to veterans affairs or something, and then from there I went to the juvenile court. And then from

there – Juvenile court I went to in '52, and then in '54 I started at Loyola in social work.

Van Ells: Yeah. Um, I've just got a couple more questions.

Probstein: Sure, that's okay.

Van Ells: In terms in GI benefits and that type of thing, other than GI bill, were there other programs that you utilized?

Probstein: Well, no, not programs, no. Well, I get compensation.

Van Ells: For your—

Probstein: For the wound.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: I get 30 percent compensation for that, but, ah, no, other than that there really wasn't. Those two things, that's it.

Van Ells: Yeah. Well, as you mentioned you worked for governments at various points.

Probstein: Yes, mm-hm.

Van Ells: Were there, to your knowledge, were there GI points and that sort of thing? There are veterans preference laws. Were you conscious of the fact that those may or may not have applied to you and benefited you?

Probstein: I think, not initially, not in the Cook County business and so on. That had nothing to do with it, and also initially here with the state, but there were certain exams that I took that, yeah, I had a 10-point preference that I used. I don't know that I – there weren't that many exams that I took, yeah, one or two, but it really wasn't a factor because there weren't that many involved really. It wasn't one of these things like it is today or the last 20 years or so. Things have changed a lot, and that would be a lot more critical in the last 20 years than it was in my time. That was just one of those sort of a throw on or add on, didn't really make any difference.

Van Ells: Yeah.

[break in recording]



In terms of your medical readjustment, you were wounded in combat, did these wounds affect you later in life, or as a relatively young person did you sort of heal up and get on with things?

Probstein: Yeah, I don't think it—I was very fortunate. I still have residual damage in the arm. It's what's called sensory nervous damage, but nothing major, you know what I mean. The arm is not as strong as the left—

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: The right arm and I'm left handed. So I was lucky there too, but no, I can't say that. I would say that it's a factor only in some respects, I suppose, when you talk about it, or I think about it. Sometimes the arm isn't just as strong, I'd like it to be stronger, you know, gee, but that isn't--that's nothing compared to what I saw in the hospital, in the military hospital, the wounds guys had, geez, unbelievable.

Van Ells: Yeah. In terms of psychological and emotional adjustments, did you have any to make there?

Probstein: I would say, probably not. It really—I don't know, it just went--it's just like, you know, if you've ever changed jobs [laughs], you know, you go from one from thing to another. It really wasn't much of a psychological or emotional thing with me, ah, just, that was it. Then you went home and went to school [laughs], you know.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: That was about the size of it.

Van Ells: Um, I've just got one last area, and that involves veterans organizations and reunions, and that sort of thing. We've discussed the 100<sup>th</sup> Division Association.

Probstein: Yes.

Van Ells: I'm interested to know if you joined any of the major veterans groups like the American Legion or VFW.

Probstein: Oh, only lately. I did join the Loyal Order of the Purple Heart. I did join that, a lifetime membership. Now, ask me why, I really don't know, except a few years ago I was at the Rotunda, Armistice Day, we were talkin' about it.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: And I met a guy there. Introduced me to him, he was with the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat, you know the Japanese.

Van Ells: Right.

Probstein: And we got to talking, and he said he was a member of the Order of Purple Heart whatever, and I said, “Well, you know, maybe I’ll do that, too.” So, ah, I did it, and I don’t know that it was a wise decision, but I bought a life membership, and they send me a little magazine every couple of months. I still don’t know what they do, but it was the only—I think it appealed to me was the fact it’s the only veterans organization that was authorized by Congress. It was a congressional resolution or something establishing it. So I thought, well, you know, why not. But that’s been really it.

Van Ells: And so you joined relatively late in life?

Probstein: Oh, yeah. I didn’t even know the thing existed until, [laughs] you know, until about, as I say, about five years ago.

Van Ells: Yeah. I was gonna ask, um, in the years right after your discharge, was there a reason you didn’t join such groups? Cause you didn’t know about ‘em? No opportunity? You didn’t like ‘em?

Probstein: No, it wasn’t that, it was— there was one group that I, you know, I really can’t tell you if I joined or not. I don’t think I did but it was not the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars. There was another one. In fact there was a famous senator and professor of economics from the University of Chicago that was a big prime mover in that, the American Veterans Committee?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: Okay, that was it. And I remember--

Van Ells: Yeah, that was on a lot of campuses actually. That’s probably—

Probstein: Right. And I remember going to meetings of that, not every many apparently, but I remember him. I can’t think of his name. In fact the reason I get puzzled why I can’t think of his name, but a friend of mine, was a communist, you know, went to high school with him, Joe Elbine [sp?], and Joe was a very brilliant guy. He got a four-year scholarship to the University of Chicago to study economics, and this professor that I’m talking about, I think he was one of the founders of the American Veterans Committee. I’m not sure. Anyway, he was gonna do his thesis under this guy, and things went along I guess for a year or so, and then Joe and he

came to the parting of the ways. I guess the professor, as Joe put it, the professor kicked him out because [laughs] his thesis was un--not only unreasonable, but was, you know, a communist kind of propaganda, and he wasn't gonna stand for that [laughs]. So, he threw Joe out, and whatever happened to Joe, I don't know, but I know he was involved in some pretty heavy stuff, and the FBI was always coming around looking for him, but, ah, that was until I left the area which was about—well, really began leaving my neighborhood area, the people I knew, around '54, when I started the school of social work, I really got outta that, and Joe's never been arrested to my knowledge [laughs]. I don't know whatever happened.

Van Ells: Um, those are pretty much all the questions I have.

Probstein: Okay.

Van Ells: Is there anything you think we've skipped over, or anything you want to add?

Probstein: No, no, no I probably bored you to tears.

Van Ells: No, no, not at all actually.

Probstein: Well, if there is anything else that you have, why, feel free.

Van Ells: Sure, I'll let you know.

Probstein: Oh, one final thing, I would say, though, that I came in later life, too, to be a great admirer of George Marshall, and I've got all four volumes so far of his papers, and I've exchanged letters with Larry Bland, the editor of the Marshall papers. I find that very, very satisfying, and, ah, I think that would be the last thing I would say. That as I got to know the greatness of this man, his genius, both militarily and otherwise, in international affairs and so on. I get a great pleasure of saying that at least to say that at one time I stood in the far, far distant shadow of this great man, and we didn't breathe the same air, but if it wasn't for him I don't think I'd be here today.

Van Ells: It was something you didn't really appreciate at the time.

Probstein: Oh, yeah, I didn't even know--like I say I just knew he was chief of staff, [laughs] I didn't know the tremendous kinds of things he did or the tremendous person he was. And I've delivered a little--I belong to the Madison History Roundtable and a few years ago I gave a talk on him. I think the guy is just fantastic, and of course it's interesting, none of the

veterans groups, I talked to a lot of guys who belonged to different veterans groups, you know the VFW and so on.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Probstein: “Don’t you want a speaker on a guy like George Marshall?” “No, we don’t ever have meetings like that.” Then I talked to high school teachers, Madison History Roundtable has had a lot of high school teachers in social studies and that sort of thing. “How would it be I come talk to your students on Marshall?” “Oh, no, we don’t do that.” [laughs] But one guy had me a year or so ago, and again now he said he was gonna call me in to have a discussion on Pearl Harbor on the event and Marshall’s place in this, you know. So, well, you know, what are you gonna do? That’s the best I can do.

Van Ells: Well, if I find an opportunity I’ll take you up on it sometime.

Probstein: Oh well, please do. Yeah, I’d be happy to do it. I’d be pleased, yes indeed, anytime.

Van Ells: Okay.

Probstein: All right.

Van Ells: Well, um, again, thanks for taking the time out of your day.

Probstein: That’s all right. Say hello to Dick for me.

**[End of Interview]**