

**VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Martin A. Poenisch**

Conducted by Deb Barrett

September 18, 2012

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This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, September 18, 2012 with Mr. Martin Poenisch at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Poenisch was born on June 14, 1926 in Chicago, Illinois. He is a retired machine repairman and learned of the Veterans History Project through his American Legion Post, which is Post 338 in Westmont, Illinois. Mr. Poenisch has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

### **Life Before Entering Military Service**

**So, Marty, where were you living at the time you entered the service? What was your life like back then?**

I lived at 2501 Clybourn Avenue in Chicago – the Clybourn and Ashland Avenue area – 1943.

**Were you living with your family?**

I was living with my folks.

**Were you in school at the time?**

I was at school at the time, and I quit. I was going to join the service.

**Was this high school?**

It was high school. My Dad said, “Don’t go until you have to.” But I wanted to go where I wanted to be – what branch. I had been out of the State of Illinois to Racine, Wisconsin and Whiting, Indiana. That’s as far as I had been out to see this big country. And I wanted to ask them for the car to go to Rockford or Rock Island, Illinois just to go, and he said, “No,” just because of the insurance and that. Anyway, in 1943 I quite Lane Tech High School and wanted to go into the service. My father said I should stay home as long as I could, and not being cowardly, but when I was called, to go and do my best; always not only in the service – doing my best not only in the service but in life, too.

Being 17 years old I thought it over a while. Not being a very religious person, I thought of the Ten Commandments, one of which is to ‘honor thy father and thy mother for their days may not be long upon the earth.’ I waited a little longer and saw everybody was going into the service – drafted into the service. And I said to my Dad that I would like to go into the branch of the service I liked. In the meantime I was thinking, I was never out of the State of Illinois; only to Racine, Wisconsin and Whiting, where my uncles and aunts lived. I asked my dad if I could have the car – a 1932 Cadillac – to go to Rock Island and Rockford with two other fellows before we went into the service. But he said, “No, no insurance and so forth.”

So I got the idea and packed a little bag with overalls and nice dress pants and socks. I was all ready military-ized. And I put it in the garage the next day. And the next day I took my swimming suit and towel and left. My mother was ironing on the

back porch. She saw me and thought I was going swimming. They didn't see me for 38 ½ days after that! I didn't say good-bye or anything.

**So you just walked out of the house.**

I just walked out of the house.

**And how old were you?**

I was 17.

We started out on the street car to Route 66 and started hitch-hiking, and we got to Starved Rock so fast, and nobody was there. The war was on and everybody was working. I said, "Let's go to California." I had \$15 in my pocket, and my friend had a little money, too. So we were off to California. We made good time.

Just forty miles outside of Rock Island the State Police stopped us. We told ... [the trooper] we were going to be 18 next month, didn't know if we were going into the service or not. And if we did, we didn't know if we'd come back or not and would like to see our U.S.A. country. We said we weren't running away from home and our parents knew about it. That was a lie! He said it wouldn't take long to check it out, but gave us a 40-mile ride to Rock Island.

**So the police stopped you. You convinced him you were not running away, even though you kind of were.**

I wasn't the smartest person. My buddy was there, and a goofy question he asked, "Do you want to know the truth?" to the trooper. But that's when I stopped him and said to the trooper we were going to be 18 in the next month and we might be going into the service, didn't know if we would be coming back, our parents knew about us – which they didn't.

Anyway, he said, "Do me a favor. If you come to town and it's late, drop in the police station. It's not the best place in the world but they'll put you up for the night. And if something were to happen in the town, we'd be clear of any bad doings." I did this in Blair [NE]; Albuquerque, New Mexico and Amarillo, Texas.

**So you just headed west.**

We just headed west. Right. And like I said, it would take a long time to explain. I had an aunt and uncle in Englewood, California and when I got there they were happy to see me and so forth. I had cousins in the Coast Guard and otherwise. They played for Pepperdine College and so forth. Finally I said I had to see the ocean because I didn't think I'd ever come to that.

I thought I was going to stay there for a while so I went to Northrop Aviation and applied for a job, which, during the war they needed. So I got hired, but I quit the same day I got hired!

**Why did you quit?**

I decided I got homesick and started to go back.

**Now, did you leave any kind of note for your parents?**

No.

**So you took their car, picked up your buddy ...**

[No car].... And my buddy was with me all the way to California, but then he left. He didn't want to hike back home. He took a bus or something, so I was on my own.

So I got to Amarillo, Texas. And the Texans let me sleep in the captain's chair all night. The other police gave us a bunk to sleep in. So I could say something about Amarillo. They had signs on the water fountain: "No soldiers or sailors or dogs allowed." And I didn't like that.

Anyway, I registered for the draft. The next day was my birthday and I knew you had to do that so as not to be a defector.

Then I got back home.

**How did you get there?**

I still hitch-hiked back home.

**What happened with the car you took? You said you drove out ...**

No. I hitch-hiked out. My Dad wouldn't give me the car. That's why I packed my bag and went west.

Well, I was still debating about joining. Time went by – June, July, August, September. A couple of months later I got my greetings. I went to the Marines, the Navy – all the branches. But it was too late. Uncle Sam got me.

### **The Draft and Entering Military Service**

**Now you said you got your 'greetings.' They were sent where?**

They were sent to 2501 Clybourn.

**And you had gotten back home by then? How did your parents react when you got back home after this hitch-hiking?**

I can't remember now. Anyway, she saw him she said I was going to California with a swimming suit and towel. I forgot to tell her I had the bag with clothes and everything else. I wouldn't give it up for the world, but not today.

But it goes to show you a police officer giving me a forty-mile ride. And I met so many nice people. And I figured 99% were good. I had some bad experiences, but it would take a long time to explain them. Also, hijacking tires – telling me to be quiet and they'd give me a ride but to keep my mouth shut and so forth.

Anyway, I was peeved because I was going to be in the Army.

What happened: 166 West Van Buren in Chicago, that morning, my Dad took me in the morning with the car. I took my physical and all that and they asked me what I wanted: Army or Navy. I said, "Navy." They said, "Army." They had the knife in me and they were twisting it already! So I was so mad.

So I'd honored my father. I'd listened to him and I'm not where I wanted to go. I took all the examinations and passed. Then I went to Fort Sheridan and took the aptitude test. The radio test I couldn't do – the Morse Code and all that. But I took it. I just wanted my pay – no insurance or anything. I was so mad. They said I would take it because they knew a lot of guys were discouraged from taking it.

### **Who said you should take it?**

The military. They were giving me advice.

So finally I woke up. If you've ever heard of the '*Angel On My Shoulder*,' with Paul Muni – I said, "Wait a minute. If I keep this attitude up I'm not going to go up; I'm going to go down." So I buckled down and took my aptitude test. And out of 250 guys, 50 of us were drafted in the United States Army Air Corps.

After that I said, "The Lord sure moves in mysterious ways!" He was testing us and seeing how much we were going to take.

So I'd hitch-hiked all the way around the States and missed Denver, Colorado. And then they sent us to Buckley Field, Colorado for my basic training!

### **How did you get there?**

I got off the train – we went on a train. And at the railroad station it was all set up with tablecloths and everything. They said, "Come inside and eat your eggs." I thought I'd woke up in heaven! I thought this isn't the Army. And from that I said that should be a separate outfit. And after I got out in 1947 they made it the United States Air Force.

I got there and took my training there.

### **Tell me about your training? What was life like when you were in basic?**

Your left flank, your right flank – they teach you to march in a unit.

### **What were your living quarters like?**

They were beautiful. The barracks were kept military style with a foot locker and so forth.

### **Was it a one-story or two-story?**

When you first got in you had two-stories at Fort Sheridan. But then when I got to Colorado it was single barracks.

**How many men were in the barracks?**

I don't remember but it was quite a few. It had a pot-belly stove to keep warm. Anyway, I wanted to be a radio mechanic, but they made me an airplane engine mechanic. And then the gunner. In fact, I wanted to be the gunner on the 29 – the tail gunner. But the government had other ideas.

**So you were at Fort Sheridan for how long?**

Not too long.

**Just a couple of days?**

Just a couple of days. I got my first 'chewing out' there. I wanted to mention that. Anywhere you went you were supposed to sign because you could be 'bingoed' they called it at that time – that's shipped out. And my mother and dad came to Fort Sheridan to see me. I went to the Service Club and they were looking for me and I didn't sign out. So I got my chewing out.

**So you at Fort Sheridan and then went by train to Denver, Colorado. How long was your basic training in Denver?**

I forget the time, now, but it was a couple of months anyway.

**And they taught you the basic of marching and all that.**

Yes.

**You did calisthenics; an exercise program?**

Right.

**What sort of classroom classes did you have? Did you have any?**

We didn't have classes during basic training. Well, first aid and all that. But after that we went to Texas.

**Advanced Training**

**So you were a couple of months in Denver. And they told you that you were going to be an engine mechanic. Did you get any of that training there?**

No. That was at Amarillo, Texas.

**So you had a couple of months of learning basically the Army Air Corps way of doing things.**

Right. As I said earlier, I registered in Amarillo and I didn't know – I came in the back door with the train six months later. I had just visited that place and the service club. I looked and thought this place looked familiar. I was there just six months before as a civilian and I came back.

I went to night school for B17's. But all of a sudden when we were going to school they got new regulations. And they figured it was coming close to the end of the war and the 17 was becoming obsolete. So they took us and changed us and started us learning the B29.

**So this was in Amarillo.**

Yes.

**How long were you in Amarillo?**

A couple of months again.

**This was really getting into your specialty, then.**

Right. So they stopped training us on the 17's and sent us to Seattle, Washington to the Boeing plant. We went to school there.

**So you went by train up to Seattle.**

Right. Then we went there for a couple of more months. It was in May of 1945. Finally at the end of the classes we were waiting in our regular dress uniforms to go to a new base, and we're waiting for the payroll. The duty sergeant comes in and he wants two volunteers to pick up the payroll in downtown Seattle, Washington. Well, I knew the duty sergeant. They said don't volunteer, but I was waiting for the dough anyway.

So I got a buddy of mine and we went to the weapons barracks to check out a weapon. They gave us a Thompson submachine gun, which I'd never seen or fired in my life. I'd fired a carbine and a pistol, but that didn't mean anything. We went to downtown Seattle with two staff cars and the submachine gun. We went into an alley and a big steel door comes up and we were waiting for the payroll.

**You were about 19 at this time?**

No, 18. And I said, "Oh my God! Here is me with a Thompson machine gun from Chicago and I'm in an alley." And they made a big deal out of it. I don't know why. And what happened? One of the staff cars got a flat tire. So we had to go into one

staff car and I had \$100,000 at my feet. And I only got \$100 out of it – my base pay was something like that.

So we took a train all the way across the northern route of the states, down through Minnesota and back home. I had a delay in route to the destination. You learn a lot as you go along.

**It sounds like you had been in training for maybe a year at this point? Six months?**

Right. And now we're going on the line training. Now we're going on to base training. But before that we learned a lot of tricks.

**So you were coming from Seattle. You finished your training there and you were 18 to 19 at the time.**

Eighteen.

**Where were you sent to next?**

I went home on a delay in route. That's all. Then I went to Savannah, Georgia to Chatham Field.

**So from Chicago you went down to Savannah, Chatham Field.**

And that was on-the-line training.

**Meaning what?**

Meaning we worked on the planes – went to school and worked on the planes on the field. But as we went out on the ramp we had classes. The instructor was giving us classes and all of a sudden we're sounding off with all the answers. And he said, "Hey! What is this? I'm supposed to be teaching you and you know all this." I said, "We ought to know – we just came from school in Seattle." So we'd had a couple of months, go there and report to the teacher and he said, "You're on your own. The government goofed up again."

Anyway, we went to the PX and listened to music, had chocolate malts. The next day we'd go to the school and go back again because it was just wasting our time since we'd already had the training.

**So they sent you for training you'd already had.**

Yes!

**Just in a different place. How long were you in Georgia, then?**

That was good! I went down to Savannah beach to go swimming. I went to Jacksonville, Florida because I took advantage of the government expense giving me this



big vacation. I hitch-hiked down there. I wanted to go down to the Keys, but I didn't make it.

And the war was coming close to the end so I figured I'd get off the base. Anytime you're on the base and something happens they close it up and you can't get out. So I got off. I was in the middle of Ocala, Florida when the war ended. And they swarmed Jacksonville and that, climbing telephone poles, traffic light wires and all. I remember one guy was complaining. He was just telling a cop, "Stop! Stop!" He was just watching by a window. He said, "You only have a war every twenty years." Fire trucks were just like ants. They were all over.

Anyway, I read in the paper: All government employees, two days off. I said, "I'm a government employee." I stayed away two days and was never marked AWOL! I finally got back to my base and they didn't get me for AWOL.

Then it slowed down. The war was over.

### **You were thinking this Army life wasn't too bad.**

It was God's will. *Que sera sera.*

So, anyway, I got back to Chatham Field and we were going to go to Stuttgart, Arkansas – for what, I don't know.

### **Did you go by train again?**

No. I don't know for what. We were there for a while and changed again. Because everything was getting into turmoil. I found out I didn't have enough points. You got out on points then – they were discharging.

### **Do you remember what the points were? Was it so many days in service?**

No. I didn't have that many points because I was a rookie.

I was supposed to go to ORD overseas, through Kearney, Nebraska. But I figured the time to get there and thought I had time to go back home for a little while. So I hitch-hiked back home.

### **From Nebraska?**

From Arkansas.

I got back home and I'm walking down Clybourn Avenue. I see my Dad's old '32 Cadillac. I turned off into a window. I heard this later. My mother said, "That's Marty! That's Marty!" My Dad said, "No, he's in Nebraska or Arkansas." So I let them get home first. Then I got home and knocked on the door and my mother said, "I told you! I can tell my son from the back or anywhere." So I stayed home a while. I wanted to hitch-hike back. They said no, so I got a train back to Nebraska.

Right then and there we had to make a decision to get out or re-up.

### **How long had you been in at this point?**

Not even a year, or a little better. They gave you a choice of a thirty-day furlough and a stripe – a promotion – because they needed occupation troops. There again comes “honor thy father and mother,” and the Ten Commandments come in, and Sergeant York. There were a lot of guys who did a lot more than I did. So I thought, “Why go out on points and have them call you back.” I thought another [one year] wasn’t going to hurt me. And there were a lot who did more than I did.

So I re-upped for another year. I became a corporal with a thirty-day furlough. So I got home again for thirty days. All of a sudden we learned ... I wired to them because I knew where I was going. I can’t remember all of this because it’s a long time ago. I said, “I’d like two weeks extension due to family difficulties.” I just tried it. And I got wired back that the two weeks were granted! So I thought I could keep this up for ...[one more year]! And after two weeks I wired again that I would like two more weeks. But they wired back no, to report as ordered.

What happened, the government did goof up. Two-thirds of the population is in the east, from the Mississippi on. The other third of the country is big, but not so populated. They swarmed the east with reenlistments. They were putting them in motels, hotels, opening up another base they’d closed down in Goldsboro, North Carolina. They opened a base there to accommodate the ones who came in.

It took eight hours from Goldsboro to Greensboro – 100 miles. And I’ve got pictures on that, too. From Goldsboro we were bunked in a house. And we went back for orders and other details at Greensboro. I’ve got pictures that I think you saw already. Then back to Goldsboro again, waiting for orders.

And I wanted to go to Germany. I had relatives in Germany and I thought I could get there. I missed by one shipment to Munich, Germany. Then they sent me all the way across the states again to Camp Stoneman, California to wait for a ship. And they gave me winter clothing – an overcoat and all that. And I thought, “Oh, no! Alaska!” But, no. They sent me to Guam with all that clothing.

I saved a few of the clothes. I had to carry all of it over there. And they burned all of it on Guam – even blankets. One of the officers said if we could and wanted, to take some of it.

### **Basically they didn’t want to ship it back.**

It was with planes, too. They used our planes for fill.

Anyway, I worked on the 29’s on Guam until we had TDY, temporary duty, shipping us back to the states. And Hawaii. I went there and one of our officers got caught selling radio equipment.

### **So they were burning all this stuff that they weren’t going to need so they wouldn’t have to ship it back. How long were you in Guam?**

[About nine months in Guam.] I was on the 315<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, maintaining the planes before we sent them back. Then we were in Hawaii. I told you ...[one of our officers got caught]. And they sent me back [to Guam], and when I got there my bomb group broke up.

## **Returning to the States**

### **They sent you back where?**

Back to Guam. I went to Kwajalein – Johnson, Kwajalein – and they had ... testing ships there for the atomic bomb, too, that they dropped.

When I got to Guam I had no group – they'd lost my records. So the sergeant said I could have a bunk there if I wanted. I could have a bunk there today. I wish I would for my back pay!

### **So how did that get straightened out?**

Well, you have air inspectors. There are inspecting generals in the regular Army and air inspectors in the Air Corps. So I went to get checked up [and Air inspector]... said I was supposed to be discharged, my year was up and here I was a man without a base. So finally they got an air-sea rescue plane. It's a B17 plane with a lifeboat underneath. And they flew us to Saipan. We went there for processing to wait for the ship.

So I was early – eight hours waiting for the ship to come in, eating sardines and crackers. Finally the ship came in. They played *California, Here I Come*. And as we passed a certain place where the Japs told their people we were sadists and raped the people and all that, that they were jumping off the suicide cliff with their babies.

I volunteered on the ship, because I'm a chow-hound. I had a buddy from Peoria, a sergeant. We volunteered at my chow and said when people could go. I had my initials, "MP" for Marty Poenisch.

### **What ship was this, by the way?**

It was the Marine Serpent. We had certain guys guarding that soldiers would stay off the bow. And we walked around and made sure everyone was posted and watching the Red Cross lady. But we didn't do too good a job.

Then, two days out of 'Frisco the orders were for all the ones in the gun turrets. The guns were gone but they had the turrets, yet. And they said, "Any object in the water, you're to report to the bridge – whether it's a box or anything – because there were mines yet." So we're walking arm-in-arm, my buddy and me, and all of a sudden a guy says, "Where do you report?" We told him right to the bridge. So we got to the bridge; [they] got out the binoculars and saw a loose mine. It was 12:00. I had all this in my book that I lost – I had a diary of it. It was a hard right and then a hard left, and the mine was just past the ship. Otherwise I wouldn't be here today.

That's what I keep telling a lot of younger people. If they tell you to do something, the Army or other service, they've got a reason for everything.

I wish I could have got that man's name today because he saved a lot of lives. If he had slumped down in that turret and thought 'the hell with it,' but here we are. It was a man who did his job by order. I'll never forget that.

**So this trip you went from Guam to Hawaii and then Hawaii back to ...[Guam].**

No, Hawaii back to Guam. Then to Saipan.

**And then from Saipan?**

On the ship back to California.

**And Marine Serpent was the ship.**

Yes.

**How long was that trip from Saipan to San Francisco? Do you remember?**

It took about a couple of days – it was about 6,000 miles.

**A couple of days or a couple of weeks?**

Not on the ship, no. I can't remember how long.

**And you said you had volunteered and were an MP on the ship?**

Yes. I volunteered there because I had so many people posted for guard duty.

**About how many men were on the ship? A couple of hundred; a couple of thousand?**

A couple of hundred, anyway, or a thousand maybe.

**What did you do in your spare time when you weren't on duty?**

I would be good in the Navy. I didn't get sick and all that. I took one of the canvas sacks from downstairs; I went under the gun turret and hooked up making me a hammock out there. It's mind over matter. You're sitting there and you drool when you got to eat.

**What were your living quarters like on that ship?**

Good. Very good.

**You had the hammocks?**

Yes, hammocks in tiers.

**How many men to a space?**

I don't remember all that. I wasn't too interested in that – just where was the mess hall.

**What was a typical meal like?**

It was good. In the Air Corps we traveled all the time Pullman and in the dining car until after the war. Like I said from Greensboro to Goldsboro for eight hours it was a box lunch. But the war was over now.

I had good service. Good food. As a matter of fact, today – I've got to watch my Army slang – chipped beef on toast. I think you've heard the other expression.

**Yes, SOS!**

A lot of them didn't like breakfast, but I got up for it. And on Guam I liked KP. All the good food – the cocktails, juice and all that were just wonderful. We had Japs guarding in the mess hall and cleaning our grease pit. We had a translation book and would ask them where they were from. One was from Tokyo and one was from a small island. And they asked where I was from. I said, "Chicago." They said, "Oh, man!" Because they knew Chicago. They were scared of me. And here I was no 'Al Capone' guy. But you just mentioned Chicago ...

**That was the image they had.**

Whether they spoke English or not, they knew what Chicago was.

Like I said, I'm doing this for the future. I would suggest anybody ...

Well, I have other ideas about education. No kid should quit school, and if they did then one year of military service. That's what I want to say. You learn discipline, respect, honor and so forth.

**Now you quit school. You were in your senior year?**

Third year.

**So you didn't finish your third year of school.**

Well, on Guam I heard about where you could finish school. And I finished high school through the service. So I got my high school diploma in 1947 from Lane Tech. And there were a lot of others when we took that test.

**So we were talking about sailing from Saipan to California. You got to California. Where did you land in California?**

In Oakland, at the Oakland base – the regular docks they have there. That part I forget – maybe it was the excitement of being home. I know we had to get back to Sheridan. It had to be by railroad. That's when we got our orders to go back to Fort Sheridan.

## **Discharge and Return to Civilian Life**

**So you were 19 or 20 about this time?**

This was in 1947.

**So you were 20 ...**

The whole time I was in was two-and-a-half years and two days. And when we got to Fort Sheridan there was still time coming and I was still wasn't out until March ...[24, 1947] or something. That's when I was officially discharged.

**You were officially discharged at Fort Sheridan.**

Right.

**So that's where you were inducted and that's where you were discharged.**

I got the discharge from Fort Sheridan, but I wasn't there. I was waiting for my discharge, but in civilian clothes. I was like on a furlough. And when it came to the end, that was it.

**How long were you in that state between formal discharge when you were really out, and when you were waiting to be discharged?**

It was thirty days.

**About a month, then, but you were in Chicago.**

Yes.

**And you were acting as a civilian, even though you had a month to go. Were you living back at home with your parents?**

At that time, in fact, when I was in Hawaii they brought the flag back from Washington that flew at Pearl Harbor. And I was in civilian clothes. And I went up to the general in civilian clothes so I didn't have to salute him. There was a law that you could wear civilian clothes, but you were still in the service.

**What did you do for those thirty days that you were still technically in the service?**

Well, I was thinking about work. Then they came out with this '52-20.' Did you ever hear of that?

## **Tell us.**

That was that when the government gave you \$20 a week for 52 weeks to give you a chance. But it didn't last that long.

Finally I ended up with International Harvester as a diesel and gasoline engine mechanic in Melrose Park. It was nice. I liked it, but every year with the union there was a strike and I didn't like that. I wanted steadiness. So finally I got out of there.

There are stories about Harvester. They paid cash on Fridays. And that was one of the big airplane engine plants, way back. And it was a big plant. And the companies always have rules and regulations – no gambling. And here they were gambling downstairs and so forth. I happened to go down there for the right purpose, and all of a sudden I come out from the stall and went back. Somebody had fainted and got hurt. I looked back and all of a sudden they said, "Let's go!" And like a swarm of cattle they came and almost pushed me over, running for the stalls. And there's only one exit. I was the first one. I didn't do anything. My foreman was there. I asked him what they were going to do. He said there was an informant, and I should just go up and turn in all my tools because they were going to fire me for gambling. I said I wasn't doing it. That's one thing I liked about this kind of union time because we had a hearing, and they questioned you. They asked me if I was down there and I said, 'Yes, sir.' They asked me if I was down there for the right purpose and I said, 'Yes, sir.' Then my foreman spoke up and said I was a good worker. Another person spoke up and said my attendance was good. They said, "Okay."

That was on a Friday, and you worked when they asked you, not just when you wanted. So Monday morning I went there and they gave me my locker back and that. The rest didn't, and I thought that was good – they sifted the good from the bad; not throw everyone out. That I agreed with. But I didn't stay long.

Then I worked for Marshall Steel over here in Countryside, at Lawndale and 66<sup>th</sup>.

My Dad worked at American Forge for 26 ½ years and he said he'd get me in there with machinery repair. That was in 1950. Then, after I got started there ...[Dad] said I had a lifetime job, which was until they closed – a hundred-year contract. Anyway, I stayed there for 38 ½ years. In the meantime I worked part-time 16 ½ years for Illinois Bell Telephone Company. So I put in a little time working.

## **Now while you were a civilian did you join any organizations – any veteran's organizations?**

In 1955 I joined the VFW. I stayed there for a long time until ...[my folks moved]. They had a shell built and we did all the inside ourselves – even digging the well and dynamiting and everything.

## **You built a home out here.**

...No – my Father. The [village] had four units. Then, finally when I came out here and got occupied, I didn't keep it. I would have had fifty years or better with the VFW, but I...[forgot].

I got married and moved back into the city. I had moved closer to my factory to save a buck. Then when the city changed with certain clientele I got out of there. I said, "Get me the first shack out of here." And I came back out here. And that was it.

**So you've been living out here.**

Since 1957 or something like that.

**And you joined the American Legion out here.**

Then, when my plant closed – they shut it – and I stayed to the last minute. And I came out here in April. It was that Memorial Day and I saw my buddies selling poppies and we talked. I said I was in forced retirement and right a way I joined the VFW. Then two or three years later I joined the American Legion. So I was occupied pretty well with the two until now I just retired: 21 years with the American Legion as Sergeant-at-Arms. And I'm a lifetime member of the VFW. And they gave me lifetime membership with the American Legion for my time, with a nice plaque.

**And you also just came back from an Honor Flight recently.**

Yes. On July 11 I went on my Honor Flight, and that was the greatest experience I had. being my first commercial airline ride. I was flying 29's and 17's, but I was never on a commercial airline! And I got pictures with my captain who flew the plane.

**So you flew to Washington D.C. and saw the World War II Memorial.**

Yes. Everything. It was the most perfect set-up that they have. If the government wants to know how to run a perfect scheme, see the Honor Flight people: 700 volunteers, no pay, and doing such a good job, where we've got people getting high pay and not doing the same work. They kind of need to wake up in Washington.

**You were also known as the 'flag man.'**

I've been 'flag man' since 1934. I was even ...[in the] World's Fair.

**And that's because ...**

My birthday! And I retire all soiled and worn flags by burning. And I also acquired a United States mailbox – red, white and blue – which is in front of my house, to deposit old and worn flags. And somebody told me they got two more and I might see how they are and pick them up to put them there. I was thinking of barrels because of the volume. I get a lot of big flags.

**So you are the 'flag man' because you were born on Flag Day and this has been an interest all of your life.**



Yes. I not only retire the flags like that, but I cut off all the grommets – they're all brass. And if I hadn't done that, all this time all that brass would be in the ground. But I put them on a wire. And after the flags are all burned I put the grommets on the wire in to burn off all the excess cloth and I've got all the brass. I put them in coffee cans, and I've got cans full of them. They don't deteriorate. Could you imagine over the whole nation if you did that how much brass you'd have?

**Oh, yeah!**

That's where Americans are. All these computers and all, they just throw them out and throw them out. They don't know how to recycle and reuse.

Way before World War II the Japanese were buying all our scrap. And you saw how they threw it back at us through munitions and that. We should be more economical and use what we can make good out of.

### **Lasting Impressions**

**How did your experiences in the military affect the way you think about war or about the world in general right now?**

Well, lately I've got a different attitude now. I'm getting more into religion. I don't go to church – I don't want to be a hypocrite going there confessing and two minutes later doing it over again. When you say you did wrong you're not supposed to do it again. I was baptized Catholic, but never brought up Catholic. I changed in the service, too – I didn't say that. I didn't know what Catholics were. So I became Protestant – I wanted to play safe. But I heard about this program from the Philadelphia Church of Christ – he had a big feud with the government and won; the government lost. It was like the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. They break down – you know, a common, ordinary person reads it and isn't getting it. But they break down what he was saying. And they do a good job on this. I'm finding out more every day. They can tell you just how in the Bible from beginning to the end what period of time we are in now – about all this weather and this and that. That's not an accident. That's the work of God. He's trying to wake up America and people. There is somebody more powerful than government and politicians. And they're not doing it like Sodom and Gomorrah. They even predict America is going to lose at one time or another. I cut this article out. Because we fill the stadiums with football people, basketball, rock-and-roll things. How many churches are filled up? And they don't believe that Christ is coming back. I don't want to get into religion, but the Ten Commandments show the way to God. ...Can you imagine if every one of us would live up to ...the Commandments. Not a one of them, the people, believe in that? He's going to come back but it takes some people like the doubting Thomas who wouldn't believe until he felt the nails in His hands and the spear in His side. Then he believed. And what did Christ say? Bless those who haven't seen and believe. Like I say, I don't want to get into religion. But there's one God. Even with this big turmoil and they talk about the Koran and that movie now, just because of

one person. But those people shouldn't act like animals. If there was wrong, get the one that was wrong. But to kill four of our people ... You know the situation.

But there is a German saying: 'We get too soon old, and too late smart'. They're born dumb and they never learn.

**So when you went into the military, what sort of effect did it have on your life? Do you see it as having a positive effect?**

I wish it was compulsory, at least, for men and women. If you're out of work go in there. They took the ROTC out of school. Why? That was good; you could go be an officer. And not only that. The National Guard. The Air National Guard.

And they should come back with the CCC, like with Roosevelt. The forests with the fires and all that, get them! There's a lot of work to be done. But the government is spending it foolishly. An allen wrench for \$1,000. I'm just using that as an example. They tell us to budget. They should get some common ordinary person in Washington to show them how to budget.

I'll have them knocking on my doors pretty soon!

**Is there anything we haven't talked about in this interview that you'd like to add before we finish?**

About education. A union is alright in certain places. They're a mouthpiece. They talk for you. In some cases, like I said, they sifted the good from the bad. Anyway, with education from what I've heard and read – I don't know how true it is – you get an aptitude test. You've got intelligent people and down to illiterate. But don't mix them. Separate them. Push the smart ones ahead and the next ones, then the next ones. They can be taught. I'll give you an example. When I was at Lane Tech, in geometry. The class came in and the teacher had a problem on the board. Goldberg raised his hand and said, "That's wrong." The teacher said, "Well, nobody's perfect." She said to come up and show her. He went up to the board and showed her, and she said he was right. And that's one. We're not God. Everybody makes mistakes. That's why they have erasers on pencils. And she had a problem the next day for homework, and before the bell rang he had that done already.

When you've got a poorer class of education, they kind of get embarrassed. That encourages someone to say they are going to quit. But to push. My sister got a double promotion, way back when. Anyway, we can education them – the smart ones – then the next category. And not only the children, I say the teachers, too.

The first day of high school, my first class, we're taught punctuality and all that. She comes in late with her coat on and starts jumping rope and gives us a paper and says to write down the use and care [of furs] first. And here she is opening her mail and so forth. So what is this teaching? I'm not saying everyone. Most of everything is money. Greedy.

My Dad was a tool and die maker – big dies; \$10,000 die. You put it on and cut. If you make a mistake it's not like in Hollywood where they say, "Cut and do it over again." It's got to be done the first time. Now, a boring mill operator going in and

making curves and radius [right] and that can't even see in this hole. But it's got to be done right the first time.

What I'm saying, some are over paid and some are under paid. You've got to give credit where credit is due. That's what you need for progress. That's my final thing. There's got to be a lot of change in educating. Like Father Flanagan – there's no bad boy. It takes time. And where there's a will, there's a way. It can be done.

**All right. And with that we're going off record.**