

Floyd Swenson

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Floyd Swenson

Today is January 31st, 1994. My name is Jim Will and I'm a volunteer with the Midway Village and Museum Center which is cooperating with a statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in the events surrounding World War II. We are at the home of Floyd Swenson who lives at 3681 Blackhawk Road, in Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Swenson, can I call you Floyd?

S: Yes.

W: He served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II and we are going to interview him about his experiences today.

S: I was with the, in World War II, that's true, as a combat engineer.

W: Okay.

S: The combat engineers were with the one branch of that unit. I was in 161, Infantry Division.

W: Okay.

S: We built all the roads up to them and went ahead and built the roads and stuff.

W: Why don't we start out with your full name.

S: That is my full name. I had a twin brother and my folks were going to call me Philip Floyd. Well, I was the afterbirth. (Laughter)

W: Where were you born?

S: In Rockford.

W: What date?

S: February 5th, 1907.

W: What was the name of your parents?

S: My mother's name was Anna Sophia Johnson was her maiden name. My dad's name was Carl Allen Richard Swenson.

W: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

S: Yes, I had 5 brothers and 2 sisters.

W: What were their first names?

S: I'll start with the boys. There's Arthur, Walter, Eskil, Carl and Philip and Floyd. That's the 6.

W: How about sisters?

S: The first one was Amy and the second one was Eldora. Amy was the only one that got married and she had a son that passed away.

W: So there was what, seven of you then?

S: There's 8.

W: Including you.

S: There were 6 boys, counting me, and 2 sisters.

W: You mentioned your folks came from Sweden?

S: My dad was born in __?__, and my mother was born at Hjo, Sweden. That's on the Lake [Vattern]. A lot of storms rise on that lake they used to tell us about.

W: They came over here about when?

S: The closest I can get it, my dad was—he didn't like to get into the army and they had compulsory service and he got to come over here. My uncle was on my mother's side, or her uncle rather, Oscar Lindquist, he was the father of Carl E. Lindquist that was the jeweler on Broadway.

W: Yeah, I've heard of that. Just before the World War II started, do you remember what life was like in 1941 and 1940?

S: In 1960 we moved up here from Stillman Valley. I was 2 years old when they moved to Stillman Valley and I was going on five when we moved up here. It was in 1916 they moved over to Stillman Valley. That was really cold weather. They mentioned it on TV now. It stormed so bad that it was up over the fence posts. The folks took the sled to go around the fields to get through.

W: You graduated from high school?

S: Yeah, I graduated from Monroe Center High School in 1927.

W: Just before the war, what were you doing? Did you have a job?

S: I hired out to a farmer just across the field and I went over here by Prairie Hill and I hired out to him. That was in the summertime when I was in high school but as soon as I got out of high school my folks knew Augie Lindquist. We lived right beside him in Rockford on Highland Avenue and Chicago Avenue, in that area. Augie was the first county forester and I can honestly say he's been the only one that was really a forester that's had that position. From then on it was all politics.

W: So you were farming?

S: Yes, I was on the farm on Mulford with my folks. We lived down there after 1916. Then I got to be caretaker of Kishwaukee Forest Preserve. That was when it was brand new. One fellow ahead of me, I was down there but I got in there and I was the boss. Then we had the WPA came in and I was in charge of 2 or 3 hundred fellows had come in to work in the forest preserves. I got the truck drivers in the forest preserve, too.

W: That farm you were talking about on South Mulford, that wasn't that one Blackhawk Springs?

S: It was on Mulford Road, about a mile and a half north of the by-pass.

W: Okay. What were you doing in December of 1941? So you remember Pearl Harbor, what were you doing?

S: I went into the army March 13th, now wait a minute.

W: Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

S: Oh yes, My wife and I, we weren't married yet and we were sitting at the radio with the family. Her brother was in the army at that time in the draft. He was down in Tennessee. Now I says they'll take ___?___. Sure enough ...

W: They shipped him out.

S: Anyway he was down south there and he got tired of being in just the plain Army so he got into the Air Corps.

W: Oh, okay.

S: When I was overseas he got killed bombing the Ploesti oil fields. He made only 2 trips.

W: He was in the Air Corps there.

S: Ordinarily they kind of ease up on the drafted men in dangerous situation.

W: This is your wife's brother.

S: That's my wife's brother.

W: What was his name?

S: Harold Stenerson.

W: This one here? (Evidently looking at a picture.)

S: Yeah. That's Harold Stenerson. There he is.

W: Good looking guy.

S: He was a ___?__.

W: Hm. He was with the 15th Air Force.

S: Yeah. He was a tail gunner in, I forget where, in a big bomber.

W: So you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor on the radio then?

S: That's right and before I got married, I told Edith, that's my wife, ___?__ my sister adopted him. That was Glen Johnson and he got in the Air Corps later on as a ___?__.

W: We are looking at pictures of ...

S: That's my brother and there I am. Whoever copied this down, they got it wrong. They said that he was the first one in. I was the first one in the family that got in and he got in and he got in the Medical Corps down in Texas.

W: That's your brother.

S: Yeah. That's my brother Carl. Well anyhow, Carl came home on furlough and he came into Rockford or into Camp Grant and he called up, he said, "They won't let me out." I said, "You're coming home." I remember I had Corporal stripes on. "Don't tell me I can't take my brother home," I says. He's coming or I'll steal him.

W: Kidnapping.

S: He came home. He was “tickled pink” to get home.

W: After you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor what was your first thought?

S: I was leading up to that. I told my wife, “If I get married I’m in the draft right now”...

W: You weren’t married at the time, right.

S: I wasn’t married at the time.

W: This was your fiancé, right?

S: That’s right. We got married on January 2nd, 1942, and you was talking about 1941.

W: Did you hear about—of course you must have heard about Hitler and all the troubles that were going on over in Europe.

S: Oh, we heard about Hitler long before.

W: What did you think about that?

S: I was going with another girl into Rockford and they’d send tobacco or cigarettes or cigars to her relatives in Germany. She said, “You don’t dare to send too much or they would question it.”

W: And she was from Germany?

S: No, she was Swedish. But there’s all fancy talk about that. Well, I shouldn’t bring this up yet according to the story. You better read another question.

W: You remember from the events what went on, did you realize what he was doing over there?

S: Right. Right.

W: He was up to no good and so forth.

S: Evidently. They had that on the radio. He was expecting homes and everything else.

W: What led up to your entry into the service? Were you drafted?

S: I was drafted.

W: You were drafted?

S: I was drafted and I got in on my brothers birthday, March 31st 1942. Then I was drafted.

W: Newly married and drafted, right?

S: I was married before I was ...

W: I say newly married, right?

S: I told my wife, I says if they draft me I’m not going to object. I could have been an objection, because I was married see.

W: What did your wife think about this?

S: She said, “You go.”

W: How about the rest of your family, what did they think?

S: There was nothing they could do about it. That was the draft. Now my oldest brother, Art, he was in World War I and he was in the Navy. He got half way across and he was tickled pink that he was going to go to Paris. He liked to travel. And then they had to turn around because the war was over. They had to turn around and he had to come back. He was really disappointed.

W: When you were drafted, where were you sent?

S: When I was drafted it was over here in Camp Grant.

W: In Camp Grant?

S: Well, yeah. I was drafted in Camp Grant. We had to go into Chicago for the test. You know, for our examination. Then we came back to St. Louis down to Fort Leonard Wood. That was when there was a brand new—they didn’t have any hard roads down there then. It was all dust and dirt.

W: What was life like down there?

S: I didn’t like it down there so I’d never say anything.

W: You didn’t like it down there.

S: I worked myself up and got to be a corporal and that was fine. Our sergeant (unintelligible)

W: Was that the 27th Battalion, Company A?

S: That’s right.

W: What Platoon?

S: Fourteen? Fourteen. Yeah. Fourteen.

W: At Fort Leonard Wood.

S: Yeah.

W: Do you have any other memories of your training down there, basic training?

S: Our Platoon, I was in the First Platoon then and we built bridges. There's a bridge building complete.

W: This was at Fort Leonard Wood.

S: That was at Fort Leonard Wood.

W: Okay.

S: I had a camera and ___?___

W: Pontoon?

S: Pontoon. We built bridges across the river there and it was a big river. Our Platoon was the best in the country so we got a weekend or a week off down there to, I forget ...

W: A local city down there?

S: Well, there's a camp in Arkansas. I'm getting so old I forget it.

W: That's all right.

S: ___?___

W: What did you do during your break, your furlough or your pass?

S: When we were down there, it was Lake of the Ozarks, that's where we were stationed.

W: Okay.

S: Sergeants and all we had a good old time. I never was a drinking man and never will be but ...

W: So you took care of the rest of them.

S: They didn't dare to drink much at that time. The army was really strict. There was no whoring around either. That was against the law.

W: What were you, outside of building bridges, were you trained for anything else? Any other training?

S: They wanted me in the medics. I said, "Nothing doing, I don't want to be in the medics." They just put me through the general stuff and put me in the kitchen. I said, "I don't be here, I want to work outside." So I got into that.

W: What did you think of the training?

S: It was good. I was old enough to know what was right and what was wrong. I knew how to live then because I done it during the WPA (Works Project Administration). I was in charge of groups of ___?___. That's what I got into and the Captain came out and ___?___ in peace time and he said, "You don't want to be—what you want to be is in the ___?__ engineers." I said, "Okay."

W: Where did you go from there? Were you sent to other camps?

S: The Army would send you all over the country. We got through with the second ___?___ and when I got through training that crew, they sent me home on furlough. As soon as I got back, I knew when I was in that would be my last trip.

W: You came home to Rockford.

S: Yeah, I came home. My brother, he was married, E. W. Swenson, at Swenson Spreader down there at Lindenwood. He came down there. I got home. I said, "I'll get a ride to Aurora" so he came down to Aurora, picked me up and took me home and then he had to take me back. I knew very well then where I was going. I went back to Fort Leonard Wood. They put me on a train and shipped me out to Raleigh, North Carolina, and fixed me up with clothes everything for a trip to Alaska.

W: Oh my goodness.

S: Then at the last minute they said we're going to send us west.

W: Where did you go to Alaska?

S: I never got to go to Alaska. That wasn't a war zone then. They weren't doing anything there then but there were troops there.

W: So they changed their mind and sent you west.

S: They sent me right back to St. Louis, Albuquerque, New Mexico and up to California and I knew then that I was going overseas down in the South

Pacific. We went into ___?___ a camp there, an army camp.

W: Where was that?

S: ___?___ California and I was up the Bay in San Francisco. Then we got on a boat on Catalina. You've heard of that?

W: Yes.

S: Well, we went down on that and then boarded ship to be shipped out and a lot of fun about it. We got out about a day and turned right around and come back and took us right back to the same area.

W: A change of plans?

S: No, something wrong with the ship. It was a Belgium ship — (This part is inaudible. Laughter)

W: Now at this time what unit were you in? Do you remember?

S: What unit? We were assigned to that group right there, Company A.

W: Was it the 125th?

S: Yeah. That's the division we were in. There's my brother-in-law.

W: Okay.

S: My wife's brother.

W: So anyway you were saying the boat turned around. The ship turned around.

S: The boat turned around and we came back to camp ___?___ there's a submarine out there and it hit the ship. The old Army gig, see.

W: Oh, okay.

S: Pretty soon I looked out and it was just a ship sitting.

W: Malfunction.

S: Malfunction. Then it took over 15 days to go down to Noumea. That's down there in the South Pacific.

W: Where?

S: In the Guadalcanal area. Down in New Caledonia. That's an island. That's French.

W: When was this? Do you remember?

S: Huh. What was that?

W: Do you remember what date when you arrived or when you departed?

S: The ship—No, I don't remember the date exactly.

W: It's hard to remember dates.

S: I was in the hospital here (Probably showing a picture). Well, we'll come to that.

W: All right. We'll get to that. Is this the name of the ship?

S: This was coming home.

W: Oh, okay.

S: That wasn't going over. We were on that British or that ...

W: That ship from Belgium.

S: That ship from Belgium.

W: You went all the way on that same ship then.

S: Yeah, we went to—on that same ship all the way to New Caledonia. Then one morning we got up. A lot of us would sleep on top deck. It was dangerous in one way. We should be downstairs and nobody would light a cigarette and it was shipping ... One morning we got up and we said, "Hey, wait a minute, we're not going west any more. We're heading east." The sun was shining on the right hand side. I said, "We're going north. What's happening?" We were coming into the bay at Noumea. We went to camp there and then we had to work there for a while loading ships and then we got transferred on to the ship and when we left one of the presidential liners took us up to Guadalcanal.

W: Oh, okay.

S: They were still fighting when we landed there.

W: That was probably the end of '42 ...

S: That was in 43.' We got on a ship there and it was a presidential liner, John Adams. They took us all the

way up to Guadalcanal. From then on, we landed in Guadalcanal and I got interrupted ___?___. Talk about mud and rain and mud and more mud.

W: Was there combat going on there?

S: Yeah, oh yeah.

W: Were you involved in any of it?

S: They were bombing us and we wanted to get out of there, get out in ___?__

W: Bomb shelters.

S: In Guadalcanal and then we were suited up to ___?__ airport in New Georgia. Then we got up to New Georgia and one of the fellows—I got talking to him about taking Guadalcanal. He was one of the first. I met him in the hospital. He said there was a hill there and the Marines, before sunset, they had the Japs off of that hill. They moved that fast.

W: How long were you at Guadalcanal?

S: I'd say about 2 months, building roads and then we went to ...

W: Was it secured before you left?

S: Well, no. There were stragglers there.

W: It was still going on>

S: There were stragglers and we chased them all out. Then we went up to New Georgia. New Georgia is north of New Caledonia. It's north of Guadalcanal and I had a picture of that at one time. Any how we went up to New Georgia and took New Munda and we got through with that and then we went up to another island ...

(This ends side 1 of the tape and there is quite a long silence before it records again.)

S: Yeah, Commander in Chief at the Regional Headquarters Group. This is the last farewell ...

W: That's a photo of Fort Leonard Wood

S: That's our Thanksgiving dinner. Here's that ...

W: That's you?

S: Yeah, that's me.

W: Okay.

S: And this is our regional officer, ___?__ Erickson. That's where—San Manuel. That was one of the biggest battles and that's when General MacArthur come by and a buddy of mine—the Japs were afraid to fire at Piper Cubs. It would expose their position. I met him afterwards. He was one of the fliers over there. That's enough about that but ...

W: You were in the Philippines for 165 days or just that unit?

S: What was this?

W: Were you in the Philippines for 165 days?

S: Oh, yeah. I was there until they shipped me home. I could have gone from there to Japan. Nuts to that ___?__ sign it up in the corner and you don't know what to do. That was it.

W: Do you remember any of the individuals you were friends with over there?

S: Well ...

W: Their names? Do you keep in contact with any of those still around?

S: Here's a picture and this is Gallagher who was killed over there. I still write to his widow. She's in Georgia. Gallagher's right here. Wright, I wrote to him. Stroten was in Guadalcanal. He got shot there through the shoulder. Him and I were in the same tent. I had my half on this side and his half on this side. That was when I killed that snake. (inaudible) He got a Purple Heart

W: And that's you sitting there.

S: That's me. "Hey, Swede, turn around." I said, "Oh nuts. I didn't care if I get—I was tuckered out. I was working.

W: What were you doing here?

S: Just what I said.

W: Okay.

S: (Inaudible)

W: This was on Luzon yet?

S: Yeah. I'll show you another picture here. It was at Christmas.

W: Okay.

S: I started corresponding with him when ...

W: What was his name?

S: He was still over in—the Americans—he was in Japan.

W: Jerry Krump?

S: Jerry Krump.

S: And he lived in ...

W: Virginia.

S: Virginia. Him and Krump or Wright, I taught them how to play chess. I had learned how to play chess. I had written to my wife and said, "Send me chess men." So she sent the chess men to me. We had checkerboards over there. I taught them how to play chess.

W: In your spare time.

S: Exactly. They didn't want to play me. I knew how.

W: You were the best one.

S: But then I kidded a couple of years ago about being over there. I says, "Yeah, Krump, he's turned into a minister and you to went out playing with the women. I got a letter from him. I'll let you read it. Krump turned into a minister. When I started writing to him, I said, "Wow if your wife knew all the things I know about you" but he was a good sport, too, and he was older than—what other questions did you want?

W: Well, did you—when you were over there doing your duty, what other kind of life ...

S: Army life then was much stricter than what it is now. When I was at Fort Leonard Wood "No Smoking in the Dining Room." One time a little short guy, he was a Buck Sergeant, come in and this First Sergeant Lusander, he was in the dining room and here this little Buck Sergeant came in there, a cigarette in his mouth and he says, "There's smoking in here." He grabbed the Sergeant by the neck and by the pants

and he actually threw him right out on the road. He said, "Don't you for supper this time either."

W: How about smoking over in the Philippines, on duty or off duty.

S: We could smoke any time we wanted to. Of course, I did smoke. Before we left New Zealand and we were ...

W: Caledonia?

S: It wasn't New Caledonia. It was New Georgia and we left there—when we were leaving we had to move we had a detail moving all our restaurant stuff and chests ...

W: Footlockers.

S: Chests and stuff and there were all kinds of beer cans and Lieutenant said, "Boys, help yourself." We ended up with two cans a piece. I didn't like beer but that time I drank beer. It was so hot. It was just terribly hot. I drank two cans. I said, "That's the best beer I ever tasted but you can have your beer. That was when we got up in the Philippines and then they started pushing out more beer and ___?___ that way you'd get a certain amount.

W: They'd ration it.

S: One of our buddies, he was a Sergeant second class. He wasn't a first or a Staff Sergeant. He got too much ___?___. He told some of the guys "Ever since ___?___ he got any of that beer, he hadn't ought to have it. I give it to him. He had several demerits. He was really a good scout. When we got up in the Philippines all he needed was, I think it was 2 or 3 weeks before he could be shipped back home. It was my duty to pick out the crew I wanted to work up at the front. He said, "Floyd, please don't take me up to the front any more." It was just like my brother-in-law. Two trips and he would have been safe. There're men I know had 2 days.

W: What was your rank at the time?

S: I was Staff Sergeant at the end. I went right up the line.

W: So you let him off ...

S: Yeah, I said, "You don't need to worry I'm not going to—anybody tries to take you up to the front tell them to come to my first. He was a friend if there ever was one. Are you taping this?"

W: Oh, yeah, sure. It's all for the record.

S: I don't know if ...

W: May I read it or ...

S: Yeah, if you want to read it

W: I can stop it.

S: You can stop it off and then later, well

W: I'll tell you what, I'll read it later.

S: But any how this guy, he got into a fishing boat that he bought and he got over to Hawaii and that's where our company is at Schofield Barracks. I told him about (inaudible)

W: Did you get a lot of letters from your parents and you brothers and sister?

S: Almost everyday but ...

W: Did you get a lot of mail, too, or not?

S: Yeah, I got a lot of letters mostly from my wife and immediately family, see, but I'd write to the wife on that free postage stuff, I got one of them here, everyday unless I was in action. Here's Guadalcanal.

W: We're looking at a book over there, the 25th Infantry Division.

S: Yeah, They're from Schofield Barracks.

W: Looks like rugged country there.

S: Here's some ...

W: Now a road like this, did you, were you involved in ...

S: This is Guadalcanal but I don't know any of these boys. There's the galloping horse.

W: Shape of a horse.

S: There's some—that's where we had to build bridges across.

W: A lot of mud involved.

S: Yeah. And there's some ...

W: Casualties there.

S: A lot of those Japs. There's nothing worse than the smell of a dead body.

W: Were there a lot of bugs and mosquitoes and whatever ...

S: Yeah, a lot of mosquitoes. They were terrible. We landed up here around ___?___ that's where I lived. Here's where we got a big laugh out of that. I don't know if you noticed that or not but here is ___?___

W: He had his helmet on backwards.

S: That came out in the newspapers here in this country after the war.

W: Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, had his hat on backwards.

S: Here, we're getting back home and this is kind of worth seeing ...

W: Georgia Island.

S: That was ___?___ Airport.

W: You wouldn't happen to be in this one?

S: No. No. I couldn't find—but is that it?

W: There's two pages here.

S: There's some good Japs.

W: Dead ones, huh.

S: (inaudible)

W: On your gun ___?___. You were with the 161st Engineers?

S: Yeah, we were with the 161st.

S: Did I get 2 that time?

W: Well you might have. There we go. There are engineers at work there. Bulldozing up to the middle of the track with their soldiers ...

S: At times I'd even hear a truck, or a car ...

W: Or a jeep ...

S: Yeah, a jeep and the jeep pulled the tank out.

W: Did you see any Japs at all or any Jap prisoners or ...

S: Oh, yeah.

W: They didn't take many Jap prisoners, did they?

S: Oh, yeah, we had a lot of Jap prisoners. Right after we got out of the 165 straight days, I think it was the second day after, I was walking down a ditch there and there were a lot of trees, see. Out came a Japanese officer. I said, "Hey, put up your hands." A corporal under me said, "Hey, Swede, you haven't got your rifle." I didn't need it. The Jap came right up.

W: He gave up to you.

S: He gave up.

W: You took a prisoner then.

S: Yeah and I was closest to him. I wasn't in uniform either.

W: Oh, you weren't.

S: (Inaudible)

W: Do you know what happened to him? You went back to the rear.

S: No, there were too many. That same corporal that told me "where's your rifle?"

W: You were required to carry a weapon then.

S: Oh yeah. When the Jap came out, I didn't have to have the rifle with me.

W: What if he hadn't surrendered?

S: At times, there were more men shot in back of the front lines then were actually shot up front, of our men. We went through so fast, there was one place there—I'll tell you about that later. Here's where ___?___ and what's his name, Kennedy was on ...

W: Where he had his PT boat?

S: He got shot at and sank his boat.

W: Right in that strait there.

S: ___?___ My wife had sent me — she'd send jokes or cartoons. One guy was listening to the radio and he was preaching about the cost of this and the cost of that. He gets done talking. Well I can't say how he worded it but he was all fed up on his cartoon. And lo and behold I turned that cartoon over and it showed this island that showed exactly where Kennedy was shot.

W: On the back of the ___?___.

S: We couldn't write home and I couldn't tell her in so many words ...

W: Where you were at.

S: Couldn't tell her where I'm at. The letters were censored. Now they can write and tell them everything.

W: Yeah.

S: Now we come to the picture of a ...

(Much of this is inaudible as it appears he is looking through a book trying to find something.)

S: That's New Zealand.

W: New Zealand Brigade, huh. There's the Philippines.

S: Yeah. We're down at New Zealand and "stike and eggs" see. Stike and eggs.

W: Stike and eggs.

S: Let's see. Now 2 — this fellows in there

(Occasional comments by both as they were looking at pictures.)

S: That burned us guys up. We had to march ...

W: In review, huh.

S: Yeah.

W: Having a little fun there? Looks like transporting vehicles through water.

S: Yeah. This book is dedicated to ...

W: How was the food over there?

S: Oh, we had our own cooks and when we moved out of there we had crappy food.

W: Cooks couldn't ...

S: Our cooks were direct from Washington and when we got up to New Caledonia the second time, he went down and actually shot a deer and this cook from Washington, he actually knew how to — boy, we had a good meal.

W: He knew how to clean a deer.

S: ___?___ our group, our platoon. Now here's Charlie McCarthy visited the area Thursday after ___?___ the corporal fixing the road
(Much inaudible)

S: ___?___ the big boys ...

W: Company E, the 161st ...

S: I was company E.

W: You were company A?

S: Here we are. There's the Lieutenant. That was him in that other picture.

W: Okay.

S: He told me ...

W: Beckwith?

S: Yeah, Beckwith. And this one's Monks and I forget this fellow's name. But they're digging up mines on their own.

W: ___?___ them or digging them up?

S: Dig them up, too.

W: Doesn't sound like too good a job.

S: No. That's where that little Irishman got killed.

W: Oh, was it?

S: That Lieutenant—One of the guys said, "If I ever see that guy again in an alley, he'll never get out alive." Just on foolishness.

W: It was an accident?

S: It was an accident.

W: Or goofing off.

S: He had no business digging up Jap mines. He should have put a charge on it and blew them up.

W: Rather than dig them up, he blew them up.

S: We'd do that with TNT. We could handle that but dynamite, we were scared stiff to carry that ___?___ would set that off.

W: Okay.

S: And when we were down there in New Caledonia we'd go down to the beach ___?___ with a big wire along and put a fuse to the TNT ...

(A lot of this is inaudible)

S: ___?___ he made a law. He was our company commander. He told our officers, "You can't go down there and dynamite for fish any more." We had a 50-gallon can, gas drum, see. We had that all shined up and fry them right there and eat them. He told the officer "It's none of your business ___?___ supposed to do that." He said, "I got a book fellows" ___?___ and parked his carcass on the back of a tree ___?___. He knew his stuff. When you're going up front sometimes there are guys you didn't like. It was just too bad.

W: Did you ever have to clean up all this wreckage and stuff.

S: No.

W: You weren't involved in any of that.

S: We left it right where it was. We'd look through the tanks and stuff. This is like the work we did. We'd pull up launch like that. We had a bunch of natives.

W: Helping out.

S: A bunch of workers, Philippine laborers under our supervision.

W: That's a type of bridge that's a photo of the bridge here.

S: That's where the Japs had ___?___, see.

W: They wrecked the bridge here.

S: Yeah. My kid says, "That's you, Dad." It could be.

W: You don't remember that.

S: We went through ___?___ and ___?___.

W: By the side of the road.

S: That's what I'm looking for. Now there's, we'd have to build ___?___.

W: The Japs destroyed a bridge there.

S: There's one of the bulldozers of the 165th engineers. There's one of the roads we made.

W: Oh, okay. Boy, that's a long hilly one.

S: We'd get way up on the top there on "Bonsai Ridge". There's the red ___?___. That's when I got the Buck Sergeant. On the second or third day we had a steep hill and they wanted a tree blown out and I dug a charge down there and put in just one charge. Ordinarily you're supposed to put 2 charges in. If one didn't go off, then you'd hook up the next one. Well, I just put in one and it didn't go off. By mid afternoon we got all the trees down. Low and behold, one of the officers came up and said, "When we leave you ..." I said, "Nothing doing".

W: After you did all the work.

S: "After we done all this work, I'm going to see them covered up."

W: What were you covering up?

S: That cave hole.

W: Oh, okay. You were burying the cave.

S: They blasted it and they found 12 or 15 bodies in there. Japs. That's what I wanted to see the actual—what we'd been doing. Here we'd been digging our way up there.

W: Now the Japanese prison camps. Were they empty or were they ...

S: We didn't capture ...

W: You didn't see any.

S: We over ran ___?___. But going up one time we took a grader up when all of a sudden machine guns—Japs opened up on them. Well, they'd already

opened up on us the day before. Everybody thought that they got the Japs up there.

W: Got rid of them.

S: The next morning, he came back with us—we'd already walked up the roads and they opened up and they shot at this grader and instead of turning around, he give it the gas and went on up the hill. He got a bronze medal out of it. Us guys, we got shot at and we didn't get a bronze medal. Even the guys who fell down and got a scratch on the knee, they'd claim a medal for it and they'd get them.

W: Did you get any?

S: I got burned. I had one hit me on the hand.

W: What, a medal. I mean ...

S: Oh, yeah, a bullet, a bomb hit it ...

W: Shrapnel.

S: Shrapnel.

W: Did you get a commendation for it then or Purple Heart or whatever?

S: No.

W: You didn't bother with it.

S: No. Some "cotton pickin" ___?___ thought it was funny but anyhow a lot of them earned it and deserved it. That's for sure.

W: Didn't sound like too pleasant an area to be in.

S: ___?___ many things to recall.

W: Did you get any of your mail? Did you ever get any packages, you know, food or ...

S: All this stuff from home. We'd get a small package of cookies or something. We had to pass them around.

W: They wouldn't let you, you wouldn't, you couldn't, outside of food and maybe clothing or something maybe ...

S: We couldn't have any civilian clothes.

W: Okay.

S: If we needed a pair of shoes, if they got muddy and dirty and that, we could throw them and ___?___ a pair of shoes and we'd get them right now.

W: Most of the packages from home were food.

S: Yes, mostly food. Now my brother, he sent some wine to me and that came through.

W: It came through all right.

S: We celebrated that.

W: Passed that around too.

S: It wasn't too much. I remember that. Everything was censored coming in. I told my wife—I told my brother if I have to mention when I was in New Caledonia I said, "If you know ___?___ it's from a town very similar to what Edith is from. That's my wife. She was born and raised in Caledonia.

W: Illinois.

S: It also came out in the paper when the 25th Division moved. It came out.

W: I suppose the civilians knew.

S: The civilians, if they knew their map a little bit, why ...

W: Could figure out the general area, I suppose.

S: When I go to Bible class, that was 2 years ago, I had that map of where I'd with that cartoon on it. One of the women there in the class was a teacher over there in Belvidere and I said "Here it is right on the back and here's where we were". She went home to look up the maps and sure enough she found out that's where Kennedy had ___?___ with his motor boat.

W: With his PT boat. Now at the end of the 165 days, were you sent back home then?

S: Yeah.

W: After all your duties?

S: Yeah. Right away they asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "I sure as the dickens ain't going to Japan."

W: This was about May of 1945?

S: Yeah.

W: 165 days is like from January to May.

S: Here's Japan. Here's Osaka.

W: Okay, these are photos in Japan.

S: Is this Japan? I went over on Japan

S: (Inaudible).

W: That's in the Philippines.

S: ___?___ Pass.

W: You helped build that.

S: My squad helped build it but they did an awful poor job on the cement jobs here. I imagine the Filipinos tore that thing down.

W: Looks like Japan there.

Both talking at once. Inaudible.

W: Here you go, January 17th to June 30th, 1945. Then they shipped you out.

S: About 3 months duration that we're ...

W: And you didn't want to go to Japan so they shipped you back to where, Hawaii maybe? Back to the States?

S: No, back to San Francisco. We just missed Hawaii. We could see Hawaii at night and we had all kinds of casualties on our boat, on our ship. They don't call them boats, they're ships.

W: Do you remember the name of the ship you came back on?

S: No. Now that's—it was a brand new ship.

W: Hard to remember those.

S: I'm at that age, forgetful too much.

W: That's okay, you don't have to—now when you were over in the States then, when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, the atom bomb:

S: Oh, yeah, yeah.

W: What did you think of that?

S: That's fine. That's fine. The officers told us the day after said that we had to watch our step, it was dangerous.

W: What was your thought of it? What did you think of the atom bomb?

S: It was fine, fine. Truman done the right thing. But a lot of people cussed him out for doing it. That shortened the war right away.

W: It saved the U. S. troops.

S: Two or three days later the second bomb came and then the Japs gave up and MacArthur took over. And MacArthur was in the Philippines, he was in the Philippines before the war started and he had to escape and go to Australia and when he came back of, I have pictures of that, too.

W: And he took over in Japan then after that.

S: Yeah. He should have been made President. He didn't believe in killing off everybody. He'd surround that island and starve them to death. Starve them until they'd give up. I got a magazine on that. Take a look at it.

W: Okay.

S: I got this book in 1979. That's all about him how starving had less fatalities.

W: They cut them off, didn't they?

S: Because he cut them off.

W: This is a newspaper of August 15, 1945. Rockford Morning Star, Second World War ends. Where were you at, at this time? You were in San Francisco yet?

S: No, I was overseas. This is 1945.

W: You were still over there?

S: Oh, yeah. I spent 3 ½ years overseas.

W: I thought you came back in June of '45.

S: No, I came back in October.

W: You were still in the Philippines then.

S: Yeah.

W: Okay. Okay. So you were over there when all of the celebrating in the States was going on at the end of the war.

S: Oh, Yeah. I wasn't up in the front with any of the troops. They took us guys off by ourselves.

W: What did you do when you heard the end of the war when the Japs surrounded?

S: Well I didn't take my gun out and shoot it like they did at Camp Grant. When World War I was over a fellow at Camp Grant shot and killed somebody. They celebrated World War I. I said, "I hope they don't do it in World War II now."

W: Most of your troops over there were glad it was over?

S: Oh, sure. You aren't kidding they were glad it was over.

W: What was the most difficult thing you had to do when you were ...

S: When I was in the service?

W: Yeah.

S: I'd say it was building bridges. That's heavy work.

W: Harder than those replacements?

S: Oh yeah, that's solid ground. When you start taking a boat across the river ... (inaudible).

W: How long would it take? It would depend on the length of the bridge, I suppose.

S: Oh, yeah. You take the Rock River down here. Well that's just a little stream.

W: About how long would it take you to put one across the Rock River? About 100 yards? A few days or a week?

S: Oh, no. It wouldn't be a week. You'd get it across in a day and have troops going across. First we'd make just small sidewalks and then we'd come back with the big pontoons and lay them down for the heavy equipment (inaudible)

W: When and where were you discharged?

S: In Chicago. October 8th, 1945.

W: 1945. Did you ever ...

S: My son's birthday it turned out to be.

W: Did you ever have any disabilities in the service or any connection with the Veterans?

S: I was deaf in my right ear.

W: Due to your service?

S: I couldn't hear good with my right ear but I was inducted anyhow. But there's a very prominent baseball player today, he got exempt to play baseball instead of a deaf mute like me and I served my time but he got to play baseball he's still in the news today.

W: Well, all right, now you're going to stump me here.

S: That's nothing new opening up spots to get to the Japs.

W: This is a picture of a bulldozer?

S: Yeah, that's a big bulldozer.

W: Did you drive one of those?

S: No, I didn't want to be on that. I wish I had then I would have had a good job when I got back.

W: Now these other pictures here. Are these Jap prisoners?

S: That's captured Japs.

W: They didn't look too healthy, did they?

S: But there's a big ___?___ of saws. Now the Japs when they had there saw or tractor or tank they're real quiet. Ours, you could hear them, oh man ...

W: They were loud.

S: That saw took 3 men to really operate it.

W: They used that to cut through the trees.

S: We cut trees down.

W: What's this valley again here?

S: That's San Fernando Valley.

W: Oh, okay. On the back it says "fire bomb attack." Bombers bombed that for 3 days do you think.

S: Yeah, for 3 days. We were sitting up there on the mountain and lobbed mortar shells down on them and our heavy artillery was in back of us but then they'd throw one smoke bomb down and was suppose to aim for it and then come in blasting.

W: Oh. They never fell short did they?

S: Well, they didn't fall short. The artillery knew how far they could ___?___ but there were 4 or 5 guns lined up and they were shooting and each one, all 4 of them would go off at different times, just like you were shooting with a shotgun. A captured Jap said, "We want to see that automatic cannon you got out there."

W: Oh, he thought there was only one. Now this picture of all these airplanes, is that San Fernando Valley?

S: No, that's "zeroes".

W: Jap "zeroes" [Mitsubishi A6M "Zero"]?

S: They're lined up by ___?___ Airport. They set them up.

(Inaudible. Both speaking at once.)

S: ... after the war was over.

W: Who is this one?

S: That's the guy that had the cameras. He's from Lexington, Kentucky, Sgt. McCain(?) with a Jap range finder.

W: You captured that range finder.

S: The Japs had that in the back of ...

W: To peek over.

S: You couldn't tell (Inaudible).

S: The Japs weren't so dumb.

W: Oh, no. Now this looks like the same guy. McCain?

S: Yeah. (Inaudible).

W: Must be the tank.

S: But there's a ...

W: Mother saves baby from python.

S: I cut that out of the paper. A lot of people say pythons are dangerous. If they're hungry, they'll take care of you.

W: A news clipping from the Rockford Star, January 9, 1972. A woman in Manila took a look at a 15 ½ foot python about to swallow her 3 year old baby.

S: Mine was only 12 ½ foot.

W: Six men in the vicinity wrestled with the serpent for 20 minutes and slashed it dead with knives. Can you tell us about the V-mail? What was that?

S: What?

W: V-mail.

S: Yeah, V-mail, yeah.

W: How did they do that? You wrote a letter and then ...

S: We'd write out the letter and the army had to reduce that down small and then send it home.

W: Like about an 8 x 10 reduced down to 3 x 4 or so.

S: Yes.

W: Was that for light weight?

S: That was for light weight. And we'd get a lot of that.

W: Interesting.

S: That's quite a souvenir.

W: I'll read that later.

W: Getting back to the questions here, is there one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement while you were in the service?

S: Special? I imagine being advanced from corporal on up to staff sergeant.

W: You were a corporal and then you were made a staff sergeant.

S: Nobody came up from where I did with stripes, very few. I was corporal here in training men for two groups for 3 months and I was corporal most of the time. When my brother, when he returned out here at Camp Grant, he called home and said, "I can't come, they won't let me come". I said, "I'll be down to see you." I had my stripes on and that and I said, "What do you mean I can't take my brother home?" I said, "we're going home".

W: Do you remember VE Day in Europe?

S: Yeah.

W: You were probably in the Philippines, right?

S: Yeah, we were in the Philippines.

W: What did you think about that?

S: Then we got instructions about the bomber in the end. The atomic bomb.

W: The atomic bomb, okay.

S: That hastened the rest ...

W: Did you think that was good or bad?

S: We thought it was good but we had to watch our step then because we knew the Japs were trying to get the atomic bomb on us and we were warned about it but that was over the hill.

W: What is your opinion now about it now on this date in 1994?

S: I still got hatred towards the Japs.

W: You do.

S: But right now it isn't as intense as it was but in those days you captured a guy they'd go in back of the lines and one guy said, "If I had my rifle I'd shoot him again." I said, "Now wait a minute. That's not right. You can't do that. You got your man. He's supposed to be secure."

W: A prisoner.

S: Yeah. That's it.

W: What about VJ Day then when the Japs did surrender?

S: I said, "I hope you guys keep the bullets out of your guns. Don't shoot anybody." Because we heard about them killing men here at Camp Grant.

W: Celebrating.

S: Celebrating. That's down right stupid. That's no way to celebrate.

W: You were over in the Philippines then, too, right?

S: Yeah, we were over in the Philippines then.

W: Was there a lot of celebrating out side of shooting their weapons off. Parties and stuff?

S: We were over by ___?___ Field at that time.

W: Okay.

S: We had seen enough of war that I didn't think we had to celebrate like that.

W: Did you get any disability while you were over there?

S: I had kidney stones and I was in the hospital for 3 months.

W: With the fever ...

S: ... with kidney stones first. Then as soon as I got ready to go back to the service, a nurse come out and put thermometers in four fellows there and myself. She got my thermometer and said, "Swenson, you come over here and get in bed right away." She put me in ice cubes. She left those other guys set there with thermometers.

W: How did you guys celebrate holidays like Fourth of July and Christmas?

S: One Fourth of July we were in Clark Field marching for the "cotton pickin" army.

W: For a drill or review or whatever?

S: Maybe it wasn't Clark Field. That was in New Caledonia we were marching. I wasn't in it, the march, I got out of it. (Inaudible)

W: How about Christmas?

S: Well on Christmas, didn't I ever show you that Christmas?

W: No.

S: That's in my other ___?___.

W: All right. Christmas aboard the USS Adams.

S: Yeah, that ...

W: Now this is the menu for Christmas Day, 1944 aboard ship

S: That was going up to the Philippines, wasn't it?

W: Yes. Tomato juice cocktail, creamed turkey soup, assorted olives, saltines, sweet pickles, roast young tom turkey, corn bread dressing, giblet gravy, cranberry sauce.

S: I showed you that camera picture. That was down at Fort Leonard Wood. That was before I got overseas.

W: That was only half the menu. Mincemeat pie, fruitcake, Parker House rolls, butter, coffee, bread, apples, cigars, nuts, candy, and cigarettes. That was quite a meal.

S: On board ship we really had good food. Does that answer question.

W: I think so. How about the Veterans Administration? Do you have anything to do with the VA.

S: The veterans, they got these groups and 9 out of 10 of them they get liquored up.

W: Oh, okay. Socialize.

S: And I have no use for that.

S: Not here in the States. No. Just in the hospital overseas.

W: You look like you're in pretty good health.

S: Yes, I am but I — when we left New Zealand, we had to march down to the dock and I said, "Never again will I get fat." I was 185 pounds.

W: Put on a little weight there.

S: I said, "Never again." Here just a week or two ago I met a guy up at Aunt Mary's and he said, "You eating alone?" I said, "I do all the time. My wife passed away. I don't get fat. I'll never get fat again."

W: How did your family support during your overseas?

S: Just by writing letters. That's all they could do.

W: Keep in contact.

S: The one that owned the shop down there at Lindenwood, he sent me some wine in a bottle and he wasn't supposed to do that. Any how I got it overseas.

W: In past years, looking back, what has this support meant to you?

S: You mean ...

W: How your family supported you.

S: I told you that my twin brother wore my winter coat. When I come home, there I was in my jacket. It was cold. That was October 15th when I got home. I said, "Where's my coat." My twin brother used it and left my dad's and he was a bigger man than either one of us. That was kind of bad. Then when they sold Camp Grant, that was a ___?__ "bug a boo" They went against by selling that property. They all went against me.

W: During the service they were more or less ...

S: That was after the service.

W: During the service they supported you.

S: Oh, yeah, I'd get cookies and stuff.

W: Well, that about does it, Floyd, all the questions. Any final comments?

S: I wouldn't give a million dollars to change places.

W: Wouldn't do any thing different.

S: No, I mean that I wouldn't want to go through it again. I would take a million bucks for me to go through that again. But now it's worth a million dollars to know about it.

W: For a final wrap, can you tell us what unit you belonged to?

S: I was with the 25th Division, 65th Combat Engineers.

W: Any company, platoon and so forth?

S: A Company. That was overseas.

W: That about does it. Do you want to say goodbye.

S: Well thank you very much for the interview. I've been waiting a long time and there's 100 things I could talk about but it's not necessary.

W: It would take up a lot of tape. Bye now.

S: Bye.