

A Veterans Oral History Earl Ingebretsen

Heritage Education Commission
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In 2000, Bev Paulson, Heritage Education Commission member, developed a plan to record Veterans' oral histories, starting with WW II Veterans. Bev made a significant personal donation to start our Veterans' oral history project which was supplemented by other concerned individuals, we have recorded 65 oral histories of WWII veterans plus a few Korean War and Vietnam War Veteran. The project is ongoing.

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Interviewee: Earl Ingebretsen (EI)

Interviewer: Linda Jenson (LJ)

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Transcript

EI: Earl Ingebretsen.

LJ: And where were you born?

EI: I was born in Clay County, Minnesota.

LJ: And who were your parents?

EI: My parents were Ole and Suzie [sp?] Ingebretsen.

LJ: What did they do for a living?

EI: They were farmers.

LJ: How many children in your family?

EI: My birth . . .

LJ: Yeah, brothers, and sisters?

EI: I have, I have three brothers.

LJ: Okay, and where did you go to high school?

EI: I didn't, I went through eighth grade in a country school.

LJ: Oh, okay, country school in Moorhead area.

EI: In this area here.

LJ: Okay. And – did you elect to go into the service or were, you know, were you drafted?

EI: Well, I tried to go elect, but they, at first they didn't take me but then I was drafted and they took me anyway.

LJ: Okay, Okay, so how old were you when you went into the service?

EI: I suppose I was – 23, I think.

LJ: Okay, and what branch?
EI: **Army.**
LJ: And where did you go for your training?
EI: **Well, I was inducted at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, then we went to Fort Bliss, Texas, for training.**
LJ: Okay, how long were you in Texas?
EI: **Oh, I suppose – about 10 months, I guess. Then we went on maneuvers in Louisiana. Then I got a furlough and came home for a few days and then we went – to Camp – Camp Swift, Texas, for just a little bit. Then we went over, then we went to – we went on the train to San Francisco. Then we went overseas.**
LJ: And where did you go overseas?
EI: **To the Southwest Pacific.**
LJ: You were on a ship?
EI: **Yes.**
LJ: How long were you on the ship?
EI: **On that one, I think we were on the ship for 23 days.**
LJ: And what was that like?
EI: **Lots of luck.**
LJ: Was it a crowded ship?
EI: **Oh yes. It was a crowded ship. It was an old, old ship. And it was, had been used for a – they said it had been a banana boat to haul bananas from South America. I don't know that. But it was old and we went all by ourselves. There wasn't anybody, no convoy or anything, we were – in all that time, we saw one other ship off in the distance.**
LJ: Twenty-three days and only one ship in sight. Wow. Did you have any seasickness?
EI: **No, I didn't get seasick but I was close.**
LJ: Yeah, yeah. So where was the first port after 23 days?
EI: **We went to the port of Nouméa at New Caledonia.**
LJ: And what was that like?
EI: **Well, that was kind of a nice island. It was a French island and we stayed there just a short time. We were – when we went there we didn't have any equipment with us outside of our rifles, I guess. And when we got there, then after a while we got our trucks and other equipment to go there. But that was a nice place, we lived there for – probably three months.**
LJ: Three months?
EI: **I think.**
LJ: And once all the equipment arrived, then what after those three months?
EI: **Then we loaded back on a ship, on another ship again. And then we went to, to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.**
LJ: And what was that like?
EI: **Jungle, jungle and mud.**
LJ: Yeah.
EI: **Although the main battle on Guadalcanal had been over with when we got there. And it wasn't so bad, but there was a – there was an ammunition dump there that blew up when we were there and that was kind of bad.**
LJ: Oh.

EI: There we lost most of our trucks again.

LJ: Really.

EI: So we had to get them again, then out there again. I believe we were there from – I remember we were there Thanksgiving Day. Then we loaded up on another ship and went to Bougainville.

LJ: Now what year was this?

EI: I remember it being – let's see, I went in the Army in 1942, so this would have been 1943.

LJ: Okay. And where did you go from that canal?

EI: Oh, Guadalcanal?

LJ: Yeah.

EI: We went to the island of Bougainville.

LJ: Where's that?

EI: Well that's another one of them in the Solomon Island chain.

LJ: Oh, okay.

EI: But it's further, further north than Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was – let's see how can I say it, was a turning point of the Pacific War.

LJ: Uh huh.

EI: After that, the Japanese never got any further than that.

LJ: Uh huh. What was this island like?

EI: More jungle, more – more mud, more mosquitoes.

LJ: More mosquitoes?

EI: There was a active volcano on that island and it smoked all the time we were there. We weren't so far from it and at night we could see the cloud that come out of it and it was all red with fire underneath it.

LJ: Oh. Any fear of it just, you know?

EI: Blowing up?

LJ: Yeah, blowing up?

EI: Well, I suppose. After I was back home again, I found a picture in the Life magazine; and a pilot or a plane had been flying over it and it did blow up.

LJ: Yeah. After you had left?

EI: After we left.

LJ: Thank God, yeah.

EI: We had earthquakes there, just practically every day.

LJ: Earthquakes! Really.

EI: Yeah. It wasn't, well sometimes our truck would roll back and forth on the ground, but of course there was no buildings so no damage, I guess.

LJ: How was the food supply on those islands?

EI: To start with it was C-rations and hardtack. Not too good. But we made it all right. It was good. After we'd been – after the war went on awhile and we were on Bougainville, then we were there in a big battle on Bougainville. After that was over with, why then things started to get better. We got better food and stuff like that.

LJ: Now how long were you on Bougainville Island?

EI: I think we were there probably – oh I'm just guessing but I think eight months, probably. We was there quite awhile.

LJ: And what were you doing at that point, during that time?

EI: Well I was a jeep driver all the time. And I, that was my main job. I drove, I drove a jeep for the battalion commander. It wasn't so bad " ____." Oh we had some good times and we had some bad times.

LJ: Yeah, yeah. Did you have some special buddies that you got to know during that time?

EI: Oh sure, yeah. I suppose when we were up at, it was probably more so that way because you got better acquainted with. Because when we went to Fort Bliss, it was the start of the battalion just being formed, so we took our training there and then we stayed right there with them. We didn't get transferred to any other unit. Then we went overseas together.

LJ: So there got to be some pretty good friendships?

EI: Oh yeah, sure.

LJ: Any special stories that come to mind – during those, those days back on those islands?

EI: Oh, I suppose " ____." We seemed to, they didn't have anything outside of what was ever issued to us, to live with so whatever we needed or whatever we wanted, why we made it. Sometimes some of the guys, one guy made a washing machine.

LJ: Really! A washing machine, what did he make it out of?

EI: He made it out of oil drums. One drum was larger, about the 50-gallon size and he cut it off about halfway, then he made the, the tub for the machine. He made it out of a 30-gallon drum and he set it inside of this. And it was connected up with some shafts and things so the drum would turn in there. Then to make the power for it, why, we didn't have any power, so they run a stick out there from the side of it; and then they run another stick over to a truck wheel. They just jacked up to the truck wheel and took off one of the lug bolts on the wheel and jacked it up and started the engine and that would rotate.

LJ: That would get the agitation.

EI: It worked pretty good.

LJ: Wow!

EI: And then I always kind of liked radios, somewhat, so I made a radio when I was there. We didn't have any power or anything so I, we made a radio that didn't take any power.

LJ: How'd you do that?

EI: Well, you don't, you never heard of a crystals radio I suppose have you?

LJ: Foreign.

EI: – Well, you have to have a radio station close and we had a station on the island. After, after we had been a while the Armed Forces set up a station and it wasn't so far away. So all we had to do was put up a antenna on the trees and have a ground rod and a ground wire by our tent. Then I made the radio out of some coils and things but you had to have a crystal. Well, we didn't have a crystal. So I read in a magazine or something about how to do it. And we took the lead out of a storage battery and melted it. And I should say that I was in the motor pool so we had access to tools and things like that.

LJ: Okay, that helped.

EI: That helped. And we melted this lead and when it got to be a certain temperature, it was molten lead. And I – and the instructions said to put – put sulfur in it. So we got some sulfur from the medics and we dumped sulfur in there and it flamed all over. And when it cooled down, we broke it apart and there was little bits of

crystals in there. So we took those little crystals and we took them apart and mounted them into some rifle shells that were cut up, just, just for something to put it in. And then we added some other wiring and into the coils and stuff. Then we – in order to hear from it you had to have earphones. Well that’s something else we didn’t have, so we stole them from the signal corps.

LJ: From the what?

EI: **From the signal corps.**

LJ: Oh, you got some from them.

EI: **Yeah. They didn’t know it, though.**

LJ: They didn’t know that. ... Whatever works.

EI: **Anyway, by the time we got done we had that little radio set up and we had five sets of earphones between two tents. We did pretty good.**

LJ: That’s – quite the achievement.

EI: “ _____ ”

LJ: Pardon?

EI: “ _____ ”

LJ: Hmm?

EI: **I said “ _____ ”**

LJ: Oh. – Where did you go after that island, what was, what was next?

EI: **Oh, then the next island was New Britain, which is another one in that chain. And I just was there for just a little bit and then we moved again to New Guinea and then we were there for a while. Not long. Maybe – at that time they were getting ready to invade the Philippine Islands. And that was kind of staging area for that then. I suppose we were there maybe for two, three weeks. In fact, I guess we lived on the ship all the time we was there. Then after that we – this would be then the late part of 1944, just about the end of ’44, and then we went to, we made the invasion of Luzon Island in the Philippine Islands. And we landed at some place called Lingayen Gulf.**

LJ: Where?

EI: **Lingayen Gulf.**

LJ: Oh, hmm.

EI: **It’s up in the northern part of this Luzon.**

LJ: And, how long were you there?

EI: **Well, let’s see. When we landed, when we took off from the ship there to get on shore, it was on the 9th of January, I think, that would be ’45. And then, we were there, then we fought all the way down the island until we got to Manila and the Battle of Manila was real bad.**

LJ: Were you right in the war zone?

EI: **Oh yeah, mostly. Well, all the way down that island. – And – I suppose I could tell you about – about the – liberating of the prison camps and stuff.**

LJ: What was that like?

EI: **Well, the one camp I went to was, had been just, the Army had been through there and prisoners were already taken away from there. But it was, that was an awful place. Just real bad. That was the survivors of the Bataan Death March. And then when we was in to Manila then there was another prison camp although this, that one then was not military people in there and that was civilians in there. And that**

was in the Santo Tomas University. The Japs had taken it over for a prison camp. And them people were still there. – I never saw living skeletons before. – And then I suppose - then after that was done with why, that was getting toward the end of the Philippines campaign then.

LJ: And all those camps were liberated then?

EI: **Yeah. On that, on that island anyway. Well then, then it was – they were getting ready then to, to, to invade Japan. But then they were gone so far then that, you know there was so many people in there that the ones that had been there the longest, then they said, “You’ll be able to get home on a leave.” They were going to count against your furlough time with the “_____” just a temporary duty. So I had points enough. They went by points for all the months you was overseas and – and the length of time in the service, you got so many points, so many points. Anyway, I had points enough and they said, “Well, when your, your ship comes in so you can go, well you can go home for a while but you got to come right back.” So, that voyage took 27 days to go home.**

LJ: So 27 days to go home. And how long did you get to be at home?

EI: **Well – when I got back home or back to the United States, we landed in San Francisco, then I was on a train someplace from there to back here, when they dropped the first atomic bomb.**

LJ: Oh.

EI: **– So then I guess that, I forget how long a time I was supposed to have. But then the second bomb that they dropped then the war ended, so they, I got a notice that the leave to the States was extended, and I didn’t have to go back for service until October, I think it was and then I needed to come back and get discharged.**

LJ: I see. And where did you have to go back to get discharged?

EI: **Oh, I went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.**

LJ: Okay.

EI: **And that took 2-3 days and then I was through.**

LJ: Yeah. So how long a time were you overseas? – Two years over, three years was it?

EI: **Yeah, let’s see. – I think May of ’43 until July of ’45, I guess, so two years and some months.**

LJ: Did you receive any, any medals, any awards?

EI: **Well, I just got – I got rifle expert and then we got, we got, you know, battle awards and stuff like that. I think I have the Asiatic Pacific Campaign medals with just two or three battles there, must be three, I think. And – let’s see, Philippine Islands Campaign. Something else, I don’t really remember.**

LJ: No doubt you were thrilled to be discharged? What did you do with your life after that?

EI: **Well, I just got married and started farming.**

LJ: Okay, so you did that when you went back home? Did you have a girlfriend during the time you were away at war or did you meet your wife after you returned from war?

EI: **Oh, we had been going together; but we didn’t get married until afterwards.**

LJ: Okay. So you’ve been farming ever since?

EI: **Yeah – “_____” this farm we live on was, was homesteaded by my grandfather.**

LJ: Terrific, beautiful place. – Do you have any final thoughts about what you went through, – during your years in the service?

EI: **It was quite an experience. I sure wouldn’t want to do it again.**

LJ: Yeah.

EI: **But then I'm not sorry I went through it either.**

LJ: Uh huh.

EI: **I didn't get hurt at all so that, that was something.**

LJ: Yeah?

EI: **I come awfully close a couple of times. My jeep got hit once.**

LJ: Do you still keep in contact with any of your, your friends?

EI: **Well, there aren't many left anymore, just very few are left anymore.**

LJ: Oh. Have you attended any reunions throughout the years?

EI: **No, I never had a reunion, just I mean as a, as a whole group.**

LJ: Uh huh.

EI: **But I got together with lot of them. We used to drive and take vacations and drive in the wintertime and just go. And it was kind of fun, you know.**

LJ: Yeah.

EI: **When we was on the road then, we'd try to stop and see people and it was kind of fun. And then some of them came here. Quite a few came here. One came from Georgia. Some came from California, oh, all over.**

LJ: That's great. Mr. Ingebretsen, what do you think about the war that we're fighting now in Afghanistan, the War on Terror?

EI: **Oh, that's an awful thing, but it has to be done. I don't know what would happen if they'd let that go. You just can't.**

LJ: Uh huh. Did you ever think terrorism would hit our soil?

EI: **Never. That's something we never even thought about, you know, way back.**

LJ: Yeah. It seemed to happen everywhere else but here.

EI: **What?**

LJ: It seemed to happen everywhere else but here.

EI: **Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, when it happened here, boy, it sure woke up everybody.**

LJ: Mr. Ingebretsen, how would you like to be remembered?

EI: **Oh, I don't know. – I don't know what to tell you, what to say there for that. You mean for something special or just a . . .**

LJ: You know, just how you want people to remember you. How'd you like your family to remember you, your friends?

EI: **Well, I hope they think well of me.**

LJ: Someone who served his country?

EI: **I guess...**

LJ: A farmer?

EI: **Yeah. That's all I ever did was farm. Oh, I did a lot of mechanic work and some other stuff at the time, too.**

LJ: Anything you'd like to add before we finish?

EI: **– Well, I'm a – member of our church over there at North Buffalo and I've been – I've been a treasurer of that for I guess for three different times. And I'm a member of the Rollag tractor's reunion over there.**

LJ: Oh that's, that's a big event.

EI: **That is a big thing.**

LJ: Yeah, bigger every year.

EI: I've been there I think every – probably every time they've met or every year they've been in business excepting maybe twice, which is quite a few years.

LJ: That's terrific.

EI: **And I have a charter membership of the – of the World War II National Memorial.**

LJ: Good for you. That's, that's wonderful.

EI: **That's finally getting started.**

LJ: It's about time, isn't it?

EI: **Yeah, yeah.**

LJ: It's about time, something that's been long overdue.

EI: **I never figured out why it was so, took so long to do. I guess it's going to be quite a place, so.**

LJ: Yeah.

EI: **Have you been to Washington?**

LJ: No, I haven't been there and now I do want to wait until that's complete. It will be wonderful to see when it's finally finished.

EI: **Yeah, we went to Washington, when my daughter and son-in-law lived out there in Pennsylvania. They took us to Washington two times and it was quite a thing.**

LJ: So you got to see that Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

EI: **I don't think we saw that one, but we saw quite a bit and we certainly went, we spent a lot of time at the Smithsonian.**

LJ: Wow, interesting.

EI: **And the last time we were there we, we spent most of the time at that “_____” the place that they got started over there that's a replica of the German war prison camps. What did they call it?**

LJ: Yeah.

EI: **Oh well.**

LJ: Yeah, I know what you mean.

EI: **It was quite a thing.**

LJ: That's terrific. Anything else you might want to share?

EI: **Well.**

LJ: Do you remember that day, you came back home?

EI: **Oh yeah.**

LJ: Was it a big celebration?

EI: **Well, we come on the, come on the ship and we came, we came in a big fog. The sailors said well we're getting close to land, so everybody was looking. So the first thing that we see was the – San Francisco Bay Bridge hanging in the fog.**

LJ: Nice, beautiful sight.

EI: **Yeah. And then people came onboard and gave us some milk and cookies and stuff like that.**

LJ: Oh, nice. No doubt it was wonderful seeing your family again.

EI: **Yeah, it took – I suppose another three, four days to get back home. Nobody did any flying at that time. It was all trains.**

LJ: Yeah. What was it like walking into the house for the first time, seeing your mom and dad?

EI: **Oh, I guess I don't have anything I can say about that. It was just nice.**

LJ: Yeah. Good to be home. – Thank you very much, Mr. Ingebretsen.