A Veterans Oral History

Heritage Education Commission
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Albert Knutson
Narrator

Linda Jenson
Interviewer

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LJ: Can you state your name again?

AK: My name is Albert Knutson, 105 3rd Street North, Moorhead, Minnesota.

LJ: Albert, where were you born?

AK: I was born at Slayton, Minnesota.

LJ: How big a town is that?

AK: Oh, it's about like Barnesville, Minnesota, is here.

LJ: Who are your parents?

AK: My parents are Tom and Inga Knutson. They are both deceased now.

LJ: What did they do?

AK: They were farmers but they were both born in Norway.

LJ: Do you know how old they were when they came over to the United States?

AK: Yes, my mother was 24 and my dad was 22.

LJ: Where did you go to high school?

AK: No, I didn't.

LJ: What did you do prior to entering the military?

AK: I worked partly on the railroad and partly farming.

LJ: What was the last grade that you completed?

AK: Oh, eighth grade.

LJ: Were you drafted?

AK: Yes, I was.

LJ: How did you feel about that?

AK: Not too good.

LJ: Pretty scary, huh?

AK: Yes.

LJ: What branch of the service did you serve?

AK: I served in the Army engineers.

LJ: What was your military training like?

AK: Military … we had 13-week basic training.

LJ: And where was that?

AK: It was at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, right next to Little Rock.

LJ: Where did you go from training?

AK: We went on Army maneuvers in Tennessee and Georgia.

LJ: And how long were you there?

AK: The maneuvers lasted about three weeks, I think.

LJ: Albert, what were some of your best memories during training?

AK: Oh, the thing I can remember was that it made you physical.

LJ: A lot of exercise?

AK: It's a good course. It's good to take. It's good for everybody.

LJ: Did you serve overseas?

AK: Yes, I did.

LJ: And where was that?

AK: Southwest Pacific.

LJ: What did you do?

AK: I was in the Army engineers, we built airfields over there.

LJ: Where was your first stop?

AK: Our first stop, I mean, as far as the war, was to the northern part of Australia.

LJ: And how did you get there, were you on a ship?

AK: Yes, we went on a ship and plus we went on the train.

LJ: Tell us about the ship voyage.

AK: You want to hear about the ship voyage overseas?

LJ: I certainly do. Tell us all you can remember about your voyage over to Australia.

AK: Okay, you know the basic training that takes care of that.

LJ: How many people were on the ship, Albert?

AK: There were 4,400 soldiers and 200 nurses.

LJ: How many people were really supposed to be on that ship? What was a built for?

AK: There was a 600-passenger liner between New York and Cuba. And they converted it to a troop transport and they put 4,400 on there.

LJ: What were the conditions like, being that crowded on that type of ship?

AK: It was crowded. They stacked us up, five high. I happened to be in what used to be a prom (?) room and they stacked the bunks up five high and about 30 inches between the aisle to climb up there and this is where you slept.

LJ: Any seasickness?

AK: I didn't but a lot of them did.

LJ: And what was that like?

AK: Terrible, especially in the crowded condition like that. Yes, that was so crowded.

LJ: What did they do when they were seasick in such crowded conditions?

AK: I'll tell you, we had helmets, you know, and they had liners in them.

LJ: Um hum.

AK: We take the liners out and used the helmet to throw up in. And then, of course, you had to empty them out. Your toilet facilities were pretty bad because the toilet facilities were for a 600-passenger ship and here was 4,400, so you always stood in line.

LJ: How about feeding that many people?

AK: It's the same thing. The kitchen was just the right size for 600; or 6 to 800 passengers; and there were 4,400, so we only had two meals a day. It took six hours to go through the chow line. They started feeding breakfast at five in the morning and you're not through with breakfast until eleven and then two o'clock they started feeding supper.

LJ: Wow. Was there enough food for that many people for the length of time it took to get to?

AK: It did until the last three-four days.

LJ: Then what happened?

AK: We run short.

LJ: Was there rationing?

AK: We had to go into C-rations and stuff. It was tough because it took 34 days to get there.

LJ: Any special situations that stand out in your mind during those 34 days other than the seasickness and the overcrowded conditions?

AK: I can give you a resume of it.

LJ: That'd be great.

AK: We got on the ship in New York on January 23, 1942. And there were eight troop ships. We pulled out of New York early in the morning. We went right past the Statue of Liberty, and there were five or four escort vessels, one cruiser and three destroyers. When we were outside of New York, we thought for sure we were going to Europe or North Africa. But we kept on going south, and the next two-three days we kept going south and all of a sudden we noticed we were at the Keys of Florida. So we knew we must be going to South Pacific and in another day or two, why we could see the Panama Canal. This is where we went through the Panama Canal. That's quite a feat that Panama Canal!

LJ: What was it like?

AK: Before we could get there we saw a whole lot of balloons up in the air, different kind of heights. We wondered what they're doing up there. So they finally announced on the boat sound system that they were balloons holding steel cables up, so that any enemy plane couldn't come in low and bomb the locks, you know, that lift the ship up.

To get in those locks it takes three locks to go up and you go up 40 feet in each one. So you go up over 100 feet up to a lake and then you sail across the lake for about 15 miles; then you go right through a mountain. They cut through the mountain, way back in about 1913, I think it was. Then you go through there and that is quite a feat to see that much rock go hundreds of feet and they'd blown all of that stuff out there. And when we went through there, you could stick your hand out at the end of the ship and touch the rock wall.

LJ: It was that tight?

AK: Yes, it was that close. Then, of course, you went down the same way as you went up. When we got through there we stopped and picked up some more stuff at Balboa, that was the name of the town, I think it was. On February

1st, we left Panama sailing straight west by southwest. The weather is now very hot, even at sea. And on February 4th we crossed the equator.

LJ: What was that like?

AK: That was something. There's a difference. You're on the other side of the world. You couldn't see it or anything but it was kind of unusual thing to know you are on other side of the equator. After that our ship turned off from the rest of the convoy and we sailed into the harbor of Tahiti Island, and refueled from a tanker in a bay out at Bora Bora Island.

Natives came out in small boats with some jungle fruits and traded to some of the people onboard by using a string. They'd put some fruit on the end of the string and we'd tie a pack of cigarettes or something on it and let it down to them, you know. And they got a ball doing that. The only thing is they were mostly almost naked you know out there. On February 14 we left Tahiti and we had to catch up with the convoy again. And on the 15th, we are now back with the convoy again with four more troop ships joining our group. So there are now twelve troop ships. We crossed the International Date Line last night. We skipped February 21st altogether when we crossed the International Date Line.

February 24th and 25th the sea is very rough and many men are sick. There are 44 (4,400) sailors and 200 nurses on board. Sighted land that morning, the coast of Australia and sailed into the port of Melbourne, Australia, and docked about noon. Tons of Australians were at the docks to welcome us. We were escorted by Australian Army band to our camp at Royal Park, a camp inside the city limits. We were the first American soldiers to arrive in Australia and were they overjoyed. I sent a cable to all that I had arrived safely. We had to send this cable to the religious organizations because we couldn't tell where we were. We stayed in Melbourne, Australia, for quite a while and we worked on the docks to unload all of these ships that came in.

LJ: What was Melbourne, Australia, like?

AK: Melbourne, Australia, is a big city. It's about like San Francisco. It's a big city and there were a lot of people in there. And there were a lot of those civilians over there. They came down. They'd never seen an American before.

LJ: How did they treat you?

AK: They treated us just like kings, you know. And a lot of them they came down when we were down there. The civilians that came down to the camp would

invite some of us to come to their house when there was time off. They'd feed us, because they knew how we were living on the boat. So I went on a couple of them and they really feed us, treated us real nice.

We had to unload all these ships that came in. And being in the engineers, we had to have a lot of equipment. That didn't come on a troop ship so we had to wait in Melbourne, Australia, until our freighters came in with all our equipment; trucks, tractors and bulldozers, and even tanks and stuff. We had to wait and when they got there we had to unload all that stuff. After we got that stuff all unloaded, we had to load it on trains because we were going to go to the northern part of Australia. So we loaded all of our equipment on trains.

We left Melbourne by train. We had to change trains every time we crossed the state line because they'd have a different gauge railroad. So that's a lot of extra work and that took a lot of time. We went to Adelaide, Australia, which is in the southern part of Australia and then we turned north and went towards Alice Springs, which is in the middle of Australia. And that's where the railroad ended. From there on there was no railroad. So we had to unload all our equipment from the flat cars and load it onto trucks. And then we went across 1,000 miles of nothing but desert, no roads, no nothing. That took three-four days -- dusty and dirty.

LJ: Hot?

AK: Hot. We stopped every three hours for a bathroom call out in the middle of the desert. Ate the dust all the way, and all our food was canned stuff. We finally got to a town by the name of a Birdum, and that's where the railroad started again. That was about 300 miles from the northern part. We took the train for another 100 miles to a city by the name of Katherine. That's just a small town.

We unloaded there, and about a mile out of that town this is where we were going to build an airfield. The Japanese were expected to be landing in Darwin, Australia, which is about 200 miles north. They had already bombed and sunk all the ships in the harbor and they'd bombed all the buildings. So we got off and we started building an airfield there. And we were to be there for several months.

Then instead of landing there, the Japanese landed on the north part of New Guinea. So then we pulled stakes and loaded everything up and on the train and went to Darwin. Right at Darwin, staying in the Navy barracks while our ship was being loaded. Almost every building in the city has been bombed and burned by the Jap. October 10th we loaded onto a Liberty ship

and sailed off; we went to New Guinea. Actually, we went to Milne Bay, New Guinea, put our camp up and pup tents in a coconut grove in ankle deep mud and millions of ants and mosquitoes. Our eats now is nothing but dehydrated stuff and not even too much of that. We had our first bombing raid at two thirty in the morning. One bomb hit about 100 feet from our pup tents. Scattered mud all over our area and everybody got scared and shaky. When it was all over, we didn't sleep much that night.

LJ: Was anyone hurt?

AK: I didn't write it down.

The next night the Japanese made a landing. They didn't know we were there. They thought it was just a few Australians and they wanted that airfield. So they landed and somebody had noticed before they came. We figured they wouldn't come in until after dark; and they were going to take over that landing strip. So we lined everything up on the opposite side of the landing, all the guns we had and everything, you know, that we had. We weren't infantry; we were engineering. And these Japs landed and they all come and they stormed the field, and we turned searchlights on and started shooting, and by the time it was all done, there was no Japs left. They were all gone.

LJ: How many?

AK: About 80 of them.

LJ: What did you do with them?

AK: All we could do was, we dug a hole with a bulldozer right next to the airfield and put them all in there and covered them up ... marked it. And that was a tough deal.

LJ: What was that like? I mean how did you feel after . . .

AK: It's horrible. I tell you to see something like that it's a . . .

LJ: It was either you or them.

AK: It's terrible.

On December 21st had several bombing raids so far but have no directs on our campsite. On the 22nd, then we got so many troops to get in there already

and they had built the airfield. So the war was progressing up along the north coast of New Guinea, so we left.

We left Milne Bay on an old Dutch freighter, and headed for Oro Bay about 155 miles further up the coast. December 23rd, 1942, arrived at Oro Bay at midnight and went ashore on landing barges and there was an alert of Jap infiltration as soon as we landed. So foxholes were the first thing we picked out a spot for. Also, unloaded our ship by landing barges and a pontoon dock, that was tough over there [unclear] makeshifts. This is Christmas Day in 1942.

We had six bombing raids last night and our Christmas dinner was bully beef, dehydrated spuds and Australian hard tack biscuits. That was our Christmas dinner. Then on January 2nd, we left Oro Bay by foot. With a full pack we followed a NATO trail about ten miles up the coast and pitched our camp for the night. It rained all night so all our stuff got soaking wet. So we threw a lot of it away. Before dawn we were heading for Dobodura about five miles on yet and have no more to eat until we get there. Everybody is sweating, cussing the Japs for all he's worth. Got the rest of the way to Dobodura at noon and now clearing an area for our camps where we are to build an air [unclear]. Our food or rations are dropped from Army transport planes so we get just barely enough to get along on. This is where the real battle was at this Dobodura. I mean there's nothing. All the food we got had to come over by plane and the plane couldn't land because we didn't have an airfield so they dropped it by parachute. And you could hear the guns in the distance.

LJ: And what city was this?

AK: This is Dobo … it's not a city. It's just kind of a township name, just Dobodura. There was no town there. It was just an area. Buna was a town that was a few miles from there. There we could hear the shooting going on all the time. Bombing, you could see flares up in the air and they were that close. And they needed them airfields, so the airplanes could come in there.

LJ: Must have been very scary.

AK: At that time they didn't have much there for a while. Then we built the airfield and we were just about ready for planes and it was on March 11, '43; twenty-five Jap bombers and thirty Zero's came in over our field at ten o'clock this morning and caught us all out there by surprise and dropped their bomb rows the length of the field. Six men from my unit alone were killed, four in my company were killed. One lost his right hand and several

more got minor wounds. A lot of trucks, tractors and planes damaged and the airfield was full of bomb craters.

A bomb crater, I can explain that a little bit. I think it was over a hundred bombs they dropped along the whole runway trying to blow up the whole field. About three-fourths of them exploded and blew a crater. The others were timed-delayed bombs. They go into the ground and they don't explode until later on. They're timed.

LJ: How long about?

AK: Well up to 24 hours, so the only way to beat that because they had to clear the airfield. As engineers, we'd line up, go onto the runway and walk hand in hand and we see a hole about ten inches in diameter. We'd put a stick with a red flag on it. There's a bomb down there. We'd do that. You don't know when it's going to go off. And then we had people who were on a bomb squad. They were trained for that. They'd come and they'd put dynamite in there and explode the dynamite and that exploded the bomb. Then it blew a crater but then you could fill it. So that was kind of a scary job.

LJ: Very scary.

AK: That was scary.

LJ: Was anyone hurt during the . . .

AK: No, I mean we lucked out. They waited I think it was three or four hours, because most of them would go off in that time. Then we kept on maintaining that airfield and after they got going then we built another cross field for fighter planes. And the tough part of it was, I felt for these pilots flying these planes. These bombers and stuff, they'd go out and bomb the Japs up and they'd come back and some of them they can't get their wheels down to land. And some of these have B-25s had a double tail. One was shot off where you can see a hole right through the wing. They say when you come in on a wing and a prayer, they did a lot of them.

LJ: Literally.

AK: Yes, some of these P-38 fighters. Alongside a runway we built what was called a dirt strip. Because the main runway we have steel matting on, you know, for the plane. But the dirt strip we had nothing. And so, if they have to come in with the wheels up, you land right on there and they slide on the dirt. That way keep from catching fire, because if they slide on the metal you

know the friction would start a fire and they'd blow up. One B-24, that's a four-engine job, came in and he landed, but the pilot had both his legs almost shot off. He couldn't use his feet and so when he landed he couldn't put the brakes on.

LJ: This is the pilot?

AK: This is the pilot. Bullets went through and damaged his legs so he couldn't use them on his controls, you know. He couldn't put the brakes on so he landed at the end of the runway and on the other end of the runway was a whole bunch of fighter planes. About three-quarters of the way down, there is a ravine. When he got right there, he'd speed up the engines on one side to make the plane turn and he drove right into the ditch with that big airplane. And it broke in two. And they took him out of there. His feet, I didn't see it, but they said it was just dangling there. He passed out right away. That was gruesome. And then what they did . . .

LJ: Did he make it? I mean did he . . .

AK: I don't know if he lived or not because you don't hear those things. They don't tell you anything.

Then the Army, you know, airplanes were so important that they went down there and took those four motors off so they could put them on other airplanes. That's how important it was to have them. That was a bad deal there. And there were several of those P-38 fighter planes. They'd land right down on the ground and then the guy would walk out and just take a look at it. They shot down a lot of planes.

There was a while there when there was the most danger around there when the pilots in the fighter plane would sit in the airplane and wait, because he didn't have any radar. They couldn't tell if an enemy plane was coming until you either seen him or heard him or could read the insignia on them. Then when they could they took off like that, you know. They shot down a lot of them. We had been there for so long, we never got any replacements finally we're just starting to get replacements. Our whole unit had been almost two years in that one place, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

LJ: Wow.

AK: You know, no furloughs, no nothing, you see?

LJ: No breaks?

AK: So finally we took off, loaded the whole regiment, about 12-1,400 men on a Liberty ship and we headed for Sidney, Australia, for a rest period. They figured the boat ride would be about ten days. We arrived in Sidney on March 6, went by truck, or train to Warwick Farm, a camp at the outskirts of Sidney. Good to eat fresh food again.

LJ: How long a time did you have off?

AK: We got fifteen days off.

LJ: What did you do?

AK: We ate most of the time.

Sidney is a big city, so we went to shows and stuff like that. I didn't mark any of that down. Furlough was over. We had to go back to the GI work again. After the furlough was over, they called me in for a medical deal. My tonsils were bad when I was in New Guinea and they wouldn't take them out because they said, "Your blood is too thin." So after the furlough they called me in right away. They wouldn't give me anymore time there. They took my tonsils out and the blood was still too thin, it wouldn't stop bleeding. Then I got malaria on top of it.

LJ: While you were in the hospital, you contracted malaria?

AK: Yes, this is the Army barracks.

LJ: And where was this?

AK: Sidney, Australia.

LJ: You were in Sidney for the surgery.

AK: The fever was so high then. They never told me what it was. But I got it when I was in the hospital. I'd been there for about ten days and I couldn't stop bleeding.

LJ: How long were you in the hospital?

AK: I think it was about three weeks total. They wrapped me in ice and every hour they fed me Quinine and Atabrine for one whole night. When I looked up, windows and everything were a blur. The next morning it broke and I

threw it all up. It was all green. It took so long. I was so weak. It took about three weeks in the hospital. That took care of that.

We had a party, too. The unit rented a company party at a town hall in downtown Sidney, you know.

LJ: Were you able to go?

AK: Oh yes, this is just before we left to go back.

On July 17, we loaded on another Liberty ship on our way back to the jungles again. We headed out again with all new equipment. August 15, 1944, arrived back at Sansapor, New Guinea, and cleared a jungle for air drones on road [unclear]. Are you familiar with what New Guinea looks like? It's a big island.

But that is further east again and we were only there for about a month and we had to move again because we were following the Marines. When they make a landing, they take it over and we come in with heavy equipment to build roads and the airfield. This was our job. We were moved on September 14, 1944, again. We were loaded on an LST ship with all our equipment and moving out with a convoy for Morotai Island. Morotai Island is just south of the Philippines. Right at Morotai Island this morning waded ashore in knee-deep water and got our equipment unloaded and the campsite fixed up. The equipment is already at work on an airfield, which has to be finished in 24 hours.

It was just six days since D-Day so the jungles all around us are still alive with Jap. Jap planes are sneaking over every once in a while just to scare you, or whatever, but it was pretty close to the front. It is nice moonlight nights now and the Japs are making use of it by coming over and dropping at least two bombs every night. The surface is all coral rock, one foot beneath the ground, so we have to use air compressor drills to dig trenches to crawl into. Here's the good part. Twenty-four of us got notice to pack and get ready to leave tomorrow for good old USA!

LJ: Ooh, party!

AK: That was when we started to get replacements. We got 24 in, I guess; and we ship out 24. That's the way it started. The 24 ones were ready to leave; bright and early they caught a plane. It was Army plane at eleven o'clock and went as far as Hollandia, New Guinea. That's about 700 miles from Morotai Island. You know where the Celebes are? We were next to them. We could see the smoke come out of the volcanoes and so forth. And

Hollandia, that was a long ways, 700 miles from there. Then we got off there and we were waiting for a boat to leave there.

On November 11th, we loaded on a Victory ship, the Sea Ray [?] and sailed off heading for San Francisco. Instead going direct, we went to Milne Bay where we went the first time. We picked up 200 hospital patients. You know, we hadn't seen enough of that so we had to see them come without arms and without legs and carry them on all burned.

Then we sailed off from Milne Bay with the extra 200 hospital patients. There are 2,200 of us on this ship and we are on our way to the good old USA. Crossed the International Dateline today, so it will still be November 24th tomorrow, too. November 30th, 1944, this is when we arrived at San Francisco.

I'd just like to say a little bit about it before we got there. We could see that bridge, you know from about 15 miles out.

LJ: Which bridge?

AK: The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. We could see that bridge and they said, "We have to sail under it." And I said, "No, we'll never make it.'' That won't go underneath there, because you know the boat was so high.

The closer we got the higher the bridge got. And when we went under that bridge there was still a hundred feet to go and you had 2,200 hundred people hollering their heads off. Hooping and hollering! Well, that was a good feeling. We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge at 9:27 p.m. I even got the right time.

We were welcomed at the docks by an Army band, which played for over an hour. A large ferryboat took us out to Angel Island where we were processed and issued the [unclear] uniforms. There's an island in San Francisco Bay they call Angel Island. It has been taken over by the Army and the Navy. And we were there for two days, I guess. Then we left the Angel Island again by a ferryboat and took us to a railway station where we got on our troop trains and we're now on our way to our induction stations.

LJ: And where was that?

AK: Fort Snelling. December 7th, '44, we arrived at Fort Snelling, getting processed again, getting more clothes before we leave on our furlough. I

called Del at her office in St. Paul. She was working for the selective service in St. Paul.

LJ: Now that would be Delores, your wife?

AK: Yeah, yeah, Delores, yeah. And we went to her apartment and then later on in the evening, we met some of her other friends and then we decided to get married on December 16th.

LJ: How long a furlough did you have?

AK: I had 30 days. We went shopping a little bit the next morning, and then we caught a train out of St. Paul to Fergus Falls and Del's folks met us in Fergus Falls, then we went down to Erhard and stayed there overnight. On December 11th, we applied for a marriage license. December 16th got married at eight thirty this evening at Erhard. It was a very nice church wedding.

LJ: Grace Lutheran.

AK: Yes, we stayed around home until December 29th. Del and I left home today for Fort Snelling where we will spend a few days at her apartment, before leaving for Hot Springs, Arkansas, to be reassigned again. January 4th, I left St. Paul for Hot Springs, Arkansas, by way of Chicago and St. Louis. Furlough's over and back to GI life again. Arrived at Hot Springs and stayed in the Majestic Hotel, which is taken over by the Army. We ate in the Arlington Hotel, which also was run for the Army. We will be here a couple of weeks. My brother, Ted, came over from Selma, Alabama, to visit for a couple of days. He was taking pilot training at Selma.

January 18th left Hot Springs, Arkansas, by train for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, going by way of Little Rock in Arkansas and Springfield, Missouri, on to Newburg and from there by bus to Fort Leonard Wood. Arrived at Fort Leonard Wood, started three weeks training course to teach new recruits how to run heavy equipment. Left Fort Leonard Wood by train for Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

The reason I left, we were supposed to train new recruits in the Army in [unclear] but for some reason or another they were short of MPs or something, someplace. So they just called a bunch of us together and said, "Pack your stuff. We're leaving tomorrow morning for Camp Atterbury, Indiana, for military police training."

LJ: What did you think about that?

AK: I didn't think anything. I couldn't figure what in the world they wanted me to do that for.

LJ: To be a military police?

AK: Anyway, I arrived at Camp Atterbury and started a two-week's training course in MP duty. After MP duty, [unclear] waiting to be shipped out to a new assignment and they give me a choice. I could either go to Cleveland, Ohio, or Columbus, Ohio, for military police duties. I picked Cleveland, Ohio. So they sent me there.

LJ: Any particular reason Cleveland over Columbus?

AK: I thought it was closer to home. I have no other reason because I didn't know one town from another. I got to Cleveland, Ohio, and we checked in with the military police after we got there right away. We stayed right in their headquarters in the office. There were no camps or anything. We just had bunks and stuff, so I asked them if I could bring my wife down. They said, "Yeah, but you can't stay here." Well I said, "Can I go and rent an apartment someplace." "Yeah, you can do that."

So I did. I went out and found an apartment for $12 a week to rent. I called her and she worked with the selective service. She was a government worker, so she came and she got a job the next day at the -- oh what was it. Well she got a job at the R&G bus terminal in the ordinance department, Army Ordinance Department.

Del arrived this morning at the Greyhound Bus Depot while I was on duty when she came by bus. She stayed around the bus depot most of the time until I went off duty at 4:00 p.m. Then went to my headquarters where I notified them that we were moving out to our apartment. We were at this place and it felt good to live in a civilian home instead of those Army bunks. That's when she started [unclear] in our own apartment. And the rest of this is just military police duty.

LJ: So you finished out your military career as a military policeman.

AK: As a military policeman in Cleveland, Ohio.

LJ: What was that like?

AK: Well it was kind of interesting. It was kind of out of my line of work, but it was interesting. We had to have a government driver's license for one thing. And then we worked together with the detective bureau and the police department, so that any soldier that was AWOL from his camp, the camp would send a notice to the police department in town and saying that such-and-such a guy from that town is AWOL and to pick him up. So then the police would turn over to the military police, that was us, then we'd go out and try to find him and send him back.

LJ: Did you have a lot of good luck finding them?

AK: Yes, we found them in all kinds of places.

LJ: Where was the most unusual place?

AK: Well let me see. We went out to a soldier's home this morning and asked his wife where her husband was. She said he was not at home and didn't know where he was. We went through the rooms and finally found him hiding in a closet behind a bunch of dresses. He had been AWOL for four months.

This afternoon we were out near my place on 58th Street and dropped in. We had Del furnish lunch.

LJ: When you found that soldier that was AWOL, hiding behind his wife's dresses in the closet and you took him into custody, what happened to him after that?

AK: They were glad we caught him.

LJ: Really?

AK: Yes, they were glad we caught him. Because most of the time it's the family that keeps them from going back. The soldier wants to go back, but they're afraid for him, you know. Especially Clevelanders, I mean, the colored people there, they're momma's boys. So they're glad when they're caught. They come willingly with no problem.

LJ: They go right back to duty then.

AK: They go right back to camp. Then they'll get punished for being AWOL.

LJ: What punishment?

AK: Well, I don't know. They put them in the guardhouse. That's what they'd do with them. How bad it is, I don't know. We went out on a lot of these calls.

LJ: Albert, can you tell us about some of the people you met during your time in the service? Any special buddies after being in four years?

AK: Yes, there was a fellow right from Pelican. A fellow by the name of [unclear]. He's was in the same outfit. He was in A Company and I was in B Company. Then there was another guy by the name of Larson. He was from east of Erhard. Then there were two guys named Uselman [sp?] from Wadena.

LJ: Do you still keep in contact with them?

AK: We did but most of them have passed away now.

LJ: Unfortunate.

AK: Then there's one in South Dakota, a fellow by the name of Tony Quiter [sp?]. Now he is still living. We used to have Army reunions.

LJ: Do you go to all of them?

AK: I went to just about every one of them. And now they discontinued that about three years ago because there wasn't enough people left, as they were dying out.

LJ: Very sad. How did you feel about leaving the military after four years?

AK: Well I think I did my duties.

LJ: Definitely.

AK: As a veteran.

LJ: Were you excited to get on with the rest of your life?

AK: Yes, I'm still involved. I've been an active member in the VFW Color Guard in Moorhead for many, many years and also a member of the American Legion.

LJ: What did you do after you left the military?

AK: I started working at Horvik Electric in Moorhead.

LJ: And how long did you work there?

AK: I was there for 34 years.

LJ: Terrific. Albert, do you have any final thoughts about what you went through while serving your country?

AK: Well I don't regret what I did. I think that was very educational, because I came out of it without any handicap. I never had too much schooling, but I think that was equivalent to four years of high school, plus. You know that training.

LJ: A real education.

AK: Yes, because it helped me in my job, because I started out as a flunky [unclear] where I was working. And in a few years I was made shop foreman -- a shop foreman for 14 years. And I bought into the business and when I was 48 years old, I was appointed president and manager of the company.

LJ: Terrific.

AK: Plus I was one-third owner. I retired in 1979.

LJ: Have you been enjoying retirement?

AK: I have, yes. We had a lake home. We did a lot of work down there. I had a big garden down there and we did a lot of touring around. We've been to Europe a couple of times, been to Australia, Mexico.

LJ: What was it like going back to Australia?

AK: Mexico, no, I never went back to Australia.

LJ: You didn't?

AK: It would have been nice. One time I almost did, but the fare was $5,000. I just couldn't afford it.

LJ: That's expensive.

AK: But we went on a lot bus tours, the wife and I. We've been all over the United States.

LJ: That's great.

AK: Yes.

LJ: Albert, how would you like to be remembered?

AK: As a good soldier.

LJ: Anything else above that?

AK: Well, I can't think of anything right now. I think I did my duty to the country.

LJ: Absolutely. Thank you, Albert.

AK: You're welcome.