

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

Personal Experience

O. H. 1242

STEVE M. KIRIN

Interviewed

by

Frank L. Kovach

on

July 6, 1989

## STEVE M. KIRIN

Steve was born in Youngstown, Ohio on June 7th, 1923. His parents were Frank and Stella Kirin. He was raised in the family's apartment at the corner of Poland Avenue and Caledonia Street.

Mr. Kirin attended Adams School and Wilson High School for three years. He left high school to help support his parents. Steve had to leave Youngstown to find work and spent 1942 and 1943 in Chicago.

He returned to Youngstown when he received his draft notice. He entered the Army on April 19th, 1943. He was transported to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio and sent to Fort Belvedere in Virginia for basic training. Because of a bad eye, Mr. Kirin was put on limited service in the Army.

Upon completion of basic training, Steve was stationed at West Point, New York. He was assigned to a field artillery company at West Point. Mr. Kirin became proficient in the use of 105 millimeter and 155 millimeter artillery. He was an instructor to the cadets at West Point during 1944 to 1945.

His unit was responsible for the 21 gun salute of artillery guns as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's casket was transferred from the train to a hearse at President Roosevelt's funeral at Hyde Park, New York.

His unit had to finish cleaning up the area after the funeral and visited the President's burial plot. While at grave side, Mrs. Roosevelt approached them and talked to them.

Mr. Kirin has many observations about life at West Point during World War II. He also relates his impressions of a Black

Cavalry Company and a P.O.W. camp he observed while out in the mountains near West Point. His experiences in World War II are quite different from the combat troops. Steve realizes this and wanted to emphasize that they did much more than he did to win the war.

Steve reached the rank of P.F.C. in the U.S. Army. He left the Artillery in the Spring of 1945 and was reassigned to Fort McClellan in Alabama. He was discharged from the service on February 11, 1946. He received the American Theater Medal, Good Conduct Medal and Victory Medal while in the service.

After the war Mr. Kirin was a self-employed truck driver from 1946 to 1957. During this period he married M. Charlotte Audrey Bailey on May 29th, 1954. His wife is a descendent of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and J. A. Bailey of circus fame. They have two children- Mary Ann and Michael. Both of their youngsters are veterans.

From 1957 until 1972 Mr. Kirin drove a truck for Allied Chemicals. In 1972, he began working for City Asphalt. He retired from City Asphalt in 1985.

He is a member of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, St. Luke's Holy Name Society, The Croatian Citizens Lodge #66, and the American Croatian Citizens Club. His hobbies include reading.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

INTERVIEWEE: STEVE M. KIRIN

INTERVIEWER: Frank L. Kovach

SUBJECT: Limited Service; Franklin D. Roosevelt's  
funeral at Hyde Park; West Point

DATE: July 6, 1989

FK: This is an interview with Steve Kirin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on World War II, by Frank Kovach, at 1585 Sequoya, Poland, Ohio, on July 6, 1989, at approximately 9:30 a.m.

Steve, why don't we start this morning with a little bit of your background as you were growing up as a youngster. Just tell us a little bit about yourself.

SK: I was born in Youngstown, here on the South Side in 1923, June, and went to grade school at Adams, then went to Woodrow Wilson, but didn't finish school because at the time, things were really bad. I went to work to help support the parents. So then, I went to Chicago because things weren't too good here, I worked there until notification that I was to be drafted and I came back home. From here, I went to Fort Hayes, Columbus, when we got drafted and from Fort Hayes, I went to Fort Belvedere, Virginia to do basic training. I did my basic training there and was transferred to West Point, New York, the academy, in field artillery detachment. What we did there was instruct the cadets in how to fire field artillery equipment, 105 and 155's.

FK: Now that you got your notice to be drafted and you're on your way to Fort Hayes in Columbus, can you give us a little bit of your impressions going into the Army?

SK: Well, you know, as a kid of seventeen, almost eighteen, the first time away from home, you were really lost. But I had a whole bunch of guys from Youngstown, we went down by train. The first thing there, the guys get into is a crap game. That sort of eased the pain from us leaving home. But when we got down there, they had a little sergeant down there and I'll tell you, 4:30 a.m. he'd blow that whistle and you better be up, because he had one of them sticks. If you weren't up, he'd hit you. It wasn't too bad. The food wasn't... They treated us pretty good. A lot of kids, you could see, their first time away from home, they were crying at night. I felt kind of bad, myself. But I had been already away from home. I went to Chicago, so it wasn't as bad as some of them kids who never left Youngstown.

So then from there, when we went to Fort Belvedere, they had a sergeant there and every time we had a break, he'd sit there under a tree and guys would be around and he says... He was a peace-time soldier-- and he says, "You know, if you guys were in here peace-time, I'd sit under this tree here and if you did something wrong, I'd make you double time around this whole area."-- Which was a good mile square. He says, "And when you come by me, I'd have a bunch of pebbles there and he said if you lagged, I threw them at you." "Now, being that it's war time, what you do, I have to do also. So there won't be too much double time." He says, "You'll do the double timing, but not as much." So it wasn't too bad. Then from there, when I did the basic, there was myself and another fellow from Youngstown from the West Side, we were sent to West Point.

When we got there into the station, and I looked around and there was the Hudson River, there was an MP there and he said, "Where are you fellows going?" We said, "To West Point, Artillery Detachment." He called and they come down with a weapons carrier and I had never seen a place like it. Nice, big forests and we got up on top of the hill and looked over to the left and there's a big building and I asked the fellow what that was and he says that was the Thayer Hotel. I looked to the right and there was this building set up there on two tier. I said, "What's that?" He said, "That's where you'll be at. That's the barracks." Everything there was brick. I walked in there and I couldn't believe it. It was so beautiful. The mess hall, I had never seen a mess hall like that. I mean really clean, the food was terrific. Down in the cellar they had two bowling alleys, you could fire 22 pistols and stuff

like that in the cellar, they had big recreation with room for the privates with two pool tables, any kind of a book you wanted to read... There was everything in there. Trophies, I never seen so many trophies in all my life. You figure West Point outfit, for basketball, for horses, at one time, that was a PAC outfit. When I got there, all they had was, I believe, seven horses left. Them horses were used for the caisson, if anybody important died, that's when they used them.

Wintertime was something there. It would really snow. There was a lot of fellows that enlisted there from around that neighborhood and there was a little town right outside of the gate Highland Falls, and the fellows used to go down there to the beer gardens and always there would be trouble because a lot of these guys that enlisted from Peakskill and around there, went in there and the other people that had kids went away to the Army or some place else were mad and there would always be fights about that. The fellows like me that lived away from, like in Ohio were involved in that. So sometime it was kind of bad, but other than that, it wasn't bad up there. When it snowed, you had to shovel. They'd make everybody stay in and shovel the snow for officers, sidewalks and stuff like that because brother it really snowed there in the winter-time. I've seen piles as high as twenty or thirty feet because it would snow that much and there would be no place to put it so they would just bank it. I guess we were there for two years and I forget what year that was when President Roosevelt passed away.

FK: Are you talking about April 1945?

SK: I believe somewhere in there, maybe before that. We went to Hyde Park our Field Artillery unit, other units from West Point were there, and we strung up all the wire and fired the 21 gun salute and had the caisson for the President's casket and that was really something. His body had come in down at the foot of the hill.... There was a railroad track that ran by Hyde Park there, and it stopped there and they took the body out of the casket and put it in a hearse and went halfway up the hill, this was the foot of the hill and it just gradually went up. Their home sat way up on the top of the hill, well halfway up, they transferred the body from the hearse to the caisson with the horse and the boots in reverse, I had never seen that done. I didn't think them horses were going to make it, that casket seemed that heavy. It looked like it was copper on the outside. Well we got up to the top and there was soldiers lined up on each side and most of the West Point cadets... Actually, I don't think there was more than two or three handfuls of civilians, just the big people from Washington, that's all and West Point, and

some other detachments that were around the New York area there, at that funeral. When they got up to where he was to be buried, which was beautiful plot that had a hedge around it, it must have been fifteen, twenty feet all the way around and that's where his mother and father and all his relatives were buried in there. They fired the twenty-one gun salute and after, we were the last ones to leave and we had to gather up all our equipment, wire all the way down to the foot of the hill and everything. After it was all done, we went in and went to look at the grave and there was Mrs. Roosevelt standing there at grave-side. She talked to us and we asked her if we could have a flower off of the grave and she said, "Sure, take as many as you want." We talked to her for ten or fifteen minutes there, the funny part of it, we seen the little dog that followed and the big one that they had the problem with, that I believed belonged to Elliot. There was a piece in the paper where at that time, air seats were hard to come by, and somebody was bumped so that dog could get on that plane and there was a stink in the newspaper about that. That was an experience that a lot of people never got to see, going to the President's funeral. It was really something, really sad, because the band playing and those horses, those horses know what's going on because they really seem to be all in step, especially the one with the boots in reverse for the Commander-In-Chief, that was really something. I really liked that, you know, to see something like that.

FK: Before we leave the funeral, do you remember anything Mrs. Roosevelt said while you were talking to her?

SK: She said, "How are you boys doing?" It was really warm, too. Then we had to be all dressed in Class A uniform even though we were laying wire and stuff like that for telephones. She said, "I sure feel sorry for you." Because it was really warm. But other than that... Well we got to see where the car that Ford gave him, the first car that had all the gadgets up on the steering post because he was a paralytic. It had the controls on the steering wheel for the gas and stuff like that. They were telling us that many a time he would get in that car and get away from the Secret Service and go visit friends in Hyde Park there. Most of them were Republican. He was about the only Democrat up there. The Morgans', and you know, the well-to-do. They would sure have a time trying to find him because he knew all the back roads and he'd take off on them. Then I was in the hospital up there, that's before the President died, it was at West Point hospital. I was in there for about three months with a cyst operation. When they pulled the stitches out, they didn't get it all and it kept agitating it, infecting

it. Well anybody from Hyde Park or that, that got sick that was on duty up there, soldiers and that, MP's, they had to come to West Point. This one MP was telling us--I got to know him real good. He said, that when the President was there, they were ringed around that house where they were shoulder to shoulder, nothing could get by them, that's how the security was. That's about what I know about that.

FK: You say you were stationed at West Point. You told us a little bit about West Point. How did West Point compare with the camp that you did basic training?

SK: It was night and day, I'll tell you. Everything there was like I say, was built to stay. I went back after the war and it was still the same with all those buildings. They don't put anything up with wood, everything was just brick. I remember when West Point was playing, at that time it was Glen Davis and Doc Blanchard, and then they had another fellow that was in our barracks before he went into the cadet corps, he didn't have any room, Tex Colter, boy, he was big. He wasn't too swift and he couldn't grab ahold there and they let him go back. He went back into the regular Army. He came from the regular Army, as Doc Blanchard did. He was there and he was a real nice kid. We went to see the Army football games and that's when they were really good. Nobody could beat them. They had the cream of the crop, Colter, he played a little bit, Davis, and Blanchard, and we all got in free, we sat in the end zone. It seemed like most of the guys from the Army were cheering against the Army because they were in the Army and didn't like it, they didn't like being there. Then in the wintertime, I remember in the wintertime, they had a big pond up there. Like most of the guys who lived up there, and then New Jersey and New York, on weekends, if they didn't have any duty, they could go home. That would leave, I would say, twenty-five or thirty guys that lived in Ohio or out further, stayed there. We did the KP and stuff like that and this one weekend after they were getting ready to cut ice on this pond, they sent myself and another fellow up there on tractors with blades on the front and plowed the snow off that ice. The first time I got on it, I was kind of worried because it's a heavy piece of equipment. But that ice, after I seen when they cut it, I never had to worry about that. It was about two feet thick, that ice. We scraped that all off and Monday morning, they came up there and they had guys that knew what they were doing and cut that ice in pieces, big blocks, like 100 pounds and sent them down the chute into two big icehouses and us fellows were in there and we packed that ice in there. That ice was used through the whole summer in the whole camp to ice your water, tea or whatever. The last time I was up



there, back five or six years ago, they tore them all down, because they got ice machines and all that. That was some experience with cutting that ice.

From there, there was about seven or eight of us transferred out of there and they sent us to Fort McClellan, Alabama. Here the war was almost over, in fact, I think the war in Germany was starting to wind down and here I was doing basic training all over again in Fort McClellan, Alabama, and at that time, Walter Winchell called that the "Hell Hole of the South", that was some camp. I've never seen anything like it. There, this one week, there I am, I almost have enough points to get out of the Army and I'm laying in the mud, sighting a rifle, empty, no bullets or anything, you had to lay there and it was raining and along come the general from that camp, the Major General. I can't remember his name. I still had some of my fatigues and stuff that had the West Point emblem on it and he said, "I see you were at the Academy, son." I said, "Yes, sir and I went to jump up." He said, "Oh, never mind, don't jump up, lay there." It was alright for him to say that, I'm laying in the mud there with everything, but he talked to me for about ten minutes, asked me what I was doing, how come I was there and not at West Point and I explained to him what had happened.

The ones that were being transferred out, they got sort of fed up with things the way they were up there. Everything was spit and polish, you couldn't do anything out of the way and a lot of the guys didn't like it. They wanted a transfer. So we went there, I did basic training all over again, when training was over, they had me staying there because I was limited service, war was over then, with Japan too. And they put me in cooking, helping the cooks and I moved from the regular barracks into one of theirs, which was smaller, it was no better than where the rest of them were quartered because they were built real quick, out of wood and they had the pot belly stove right in the middle of the floor in the small ones. In the big ones, they had two stoves, one at each end and the people that were around the stoves, they couldn't stand it, it was so hot, the ones that were further away were cold because it came to a point. It got cherry hot and the guys who were near couldn't stand it, it was so hot, so then I worked the kitchen, and I would say it was a month before I was supposed to get discharged. They had us go into the recreation room and they had a colonel in there, and at that time, everybody was getting discharged that had the points. All the people who knew what they were doing, cadre, wanted out. The colonel came in there and he was pleading with the guys, he said, "Stay a month, stay two months, we need older, experienced people to... because we still have

draftees come in and everybody's leaving. We'll jump you in grade and stuff like that." "Oh," I said, "Almost three years in the service, no I want to get out." I remember they had a sergeant from Pittsburgh and that's what his last name was, Sergeant. Sergeant Sergeant. Here, this kid is telling me what to do and he's only about twenty years old and has been in the Army six months and he becomes a sergeant. The highest I got was a P.F.C. I said, "No, I want to go home." So they said, "Okay." We got our orders and from there I got on the train down there in Alabama and oh, it was really bad. We ran about twenty or thirty miles and stop, the train would go back. Back and forth must have been a half a day. It was one of these trains, a local, and if something happened, they'd put it on the side track. Finally it got to Camp Aderberry and that was where we got discharged. From there, I came home. It wasn't bad. I couldn't go overseas because I was put in limited service, because I can't see out of one eye that good. My eye is really bad so that's what it was all about.

FK: Did you say that while you were at West Point, you taught others how to run artillery guns and that?

SK: Yes.

FK: You were an instructor?

SK: Yes. One time it was all the horse stables, they had converted one part of it into a part with sand and little wooden buildings and that, converted into a firing range. We fired...It was simulated guns, they were air operated, and they fired a steel ball, but everything had trajectory and all that stuff, they'd call out the numbers like "open 500, raise, elevation," and stuff like that then they would fire these steel balls and try to hit them targets. The sergeants we had there were all old timers. All twenty year men, in fact, some of them had twenty-five almost thirty years. When the war broke out and had to stay in, after the cadets were three weeks there, oriented, then we'd take them out on the firing range with the real guns, the 105's and we used them mounted on the 105, they had what was a 37 millimeter was clamped on the top of the 105 Howitzer barrel. They fired the 37 millimeter shell instead of the 105 at first and fired from one hill, a mountainside, into another. Again, there was targets over there, big rock and stuff like that and then from the 37's they started to fire the 105's with different charges, like air burst and stuff like that. I remember one time I was hauling ammunition and I would drop it off at each gun emplacement and they fired a round and somebody messed up and it went over the hill and landed in some guy's yard. It knocked his

garaged down. They ceased fire right away and had a big investigation.

Then another time, I dropped off an ammunition and we'd come back into camp and wait for them to finish firing and we'd go out there and pick up all the empty cases and we're in camp, I don't think more than one hour, and the call comes in on the radio, "Cease fire, go out there and pick up that ammunition." We got out there they had had a muzzle burst on one of the guns and injured two of the G.I.'s. They took all of that ammunition, it had all the numbers from what munition dump it came from and they checked that ammunition to see if it had been sabotaged to find out what caused it. Then they found out that they had made a bad batch. It was a good thing that it had happened there instead of someplace overseas where troops would have really gotten hurt bad.

Then a lot of times, we'd be out there firing in the summer time, hot, pulling all of the equipment and coming back into camp and we'd get the call that the range is on fire out there. Firing all them shells and it would get the brush on fire, the mountainside. We'd have to go out there at night. The only way you could go out there was walk. They had a road down there, but where the fire was, you'd have to walk with a five gallon can and you're back with the spray and try to put out the fire. You know, up there, they have those big rattle snakes and a lot of guys were afraid to walk up in there at night, you know. I seen a lot of times, a guy would dump his can of water, anyplace and just have the empty can walking because that was a real hard walk up there. We'd get the fires out, but you had to put fire out and then come back in and you'd come in ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night, guys would have to take showers and then go to bed and get up the next morning and have to do the same thing over again.

We had a major there when we cleaned guns. We had these big burners that boiled the water and we'd have to clean the guns. You'd take the bridge blocks apart and you'd have to clean them all, and then put them on the table with the white cloth and he would inspect them and the guns would be elevated and he could look in.... There was this one, his name was Major White, he graduated from the academy but he injured his leg and could not go into active duty overseas or anything because of his leg so he was a teacher there, an instructor there at our camp there. Many times I saw him he had the white gloves on and wiped the barrel with his white gloves to see if he would pick up any dirt from after we'd fire. All of these guys used to snicker behind his back when he'd do that. Then at the

hotel, they always had a few guys that could get jobs there, you know, help like waiters and stuff like that. That was a beautiful hotel. It's still up, the Thayer. In fact we went up there, my friend from New Jersey that was in the Army with me, he had season tickets for football games there and I would go up once or twice a year and we would all go up and eat at the Thayer Hotel. He says, "It sure is different than when we were here in the service, isn't it?" I said, "Yes." He was laughing, I never knew this. When we used to go around the hotel and everything picking up brush and everything, limbs and stuff like that, I could never figure out where he would disappear to and he started laughing at me after the war was over up there. He said, "The janitor and the fireman had a room down there." He said, "I used to sneak down there and talk to him and he let me sleep there." I said, "Here we're out there walking around, picking up." He's laughing. He said, "Yes." A lot of times, we'd go down there on the Hudson River and fish too. They had some big fish in there. I was fishing one time and I caught something. I said, "I must have a whale." Here, when I pulled it in it was a big eel. I didn't know what to do. I cut that line and let it go back in the water. I was scared to death of that thing. It was about six feet long.

They used to have sturgeon in there that went up. Oh, I'd say about fifteen miles from there was Bear Mountain that was a resort. We used to go down there, this friend of mine from New Jersey, and I remember one time we were down there out on the lake with a couple... There were a lot of Jewish girls that came in there and we were out there in the lake with a canoe. It got late, I think it was about 4:00 in the morning. Here, him and I are walking up 9W. I said, "Mike, we'll never make it back to camp." "Oh, don't worry, we'll get it." The whole long haul, here comes a car and stops, here it was our sergeant. He lived in Patterson, New Jersey and would go home almost every night because actually it was only thirty or forty miles from New York, or New Jersey. He gave us a ride back into camp. Well, we got into camp, we got our clothes off, we got in bed and the alarm went off, they rang the bell, I imagine about 5:30 in the morning. I told him, I said, "No more. I quit doing that." The next day, the same thing. I always used to say we'd go up to Hyde Park, Peekskill and go to Poughkeepsie and at that time, go into a beer garden. Everything would close at 12:00 because of the curfew they had then. I come home, I said, "I'm not going back there anymore." I said, "Look at all this sleep we're losing, we'll have a few beers, we're kids, no more." The next day, the same thing, go right back. I remember a lot of times, pay day, standing in line and go in and after I got in,

they had raised the pay scale for privates to I believe it was \$50. Well, you signed up for \$10,000 insurance, I think at that time it was \$6.50, you go in there, you tell them who you were, and they'd look and see if you owed anything and then they'd pay you off in cash. Well, as you walked out, there would be a line going in and a line coming out, guys that would lend money to other guys, we'd wait to get their money. So the first thing I did was go up to the little PX, they had a little PX, it was up by the cavalry, which was all black and they had a lot of horses there. I would buy me five cartons of cigarettes and whatever I needed like shaving equipment and that and then the rest was spending money, which wasn't very much. Well, cigarettes at that time weren't too much, but I made sure that I had enough cigarettes for the whole month. Then go to town a couple of times, or get up in the dayroom and play cards with the guys. That, a lot of times, didn't last long and there you were, a couple weeks borrowing money again. You had to pay. But that was really something.

The basketball, we had a team. At that time, there was a fellow that went to St. John's University, his name was Harry Boycoff and I believe he was 6'9" or 6'10", at that time, that was considered big. He couldn't get into the service because of his height, but he wanted to go so badly that they got special permission for him to get into the service, here they had to have an extra long bed for him, longer bed than everybody else's and all his clothes had to be made different and everything, and the detachments played each other. The Field Artillery, the Armored Force, and the Infantry, the Cavalry and that. The Armored Force had at that time, had the best team in there. They had this Chuck Connors, that was later the rifleman, he was a terrific basketball player, but a real hot head. When they'd play, we'd get up in the walkway that was all the way around that thing and stand right over the basket and start hollering. That would make him really get mad and he'd miss. A couple of times that happened and he got so mad, he started up after us. They had to hold him back.

Baseball, same thing. He was a good baseball player. We had a couple of kids that played...One was a pitcher that played with the Giants and had a tryout with them and couldn't make it that was sent down, and like I say, the first time I ever went up to that recreational mess, I never seen so many trophies. They always had trophies for horses and baseball, basketball, swimming teams they had. It was really something. I know there was another time it was on a weekend in the summertime, they had a swimming pool there that the fellows years ago had built and we were there fooling around. Me, I

don't know how to swim and they'd start playing water tag. I'm chasing this guy. He run out there on that diving board and went in, I'm on that diving board right after him and I jumped. I was out there half way in the air there and I said, "What am I doing here, I don't know how to swim." I hit that water and two times, I went down, I come up, I go down again, and everybody was laughing, they didn't know that I didn't know how to swim. This one guy says, "You better go get him, he doesn't know how to swim." So he pulled me up. The funny part of that was the day before that, the infantry had a picnic and they had a sergeant drown and that seemed like that was the first thing that come to my mind when I was down in that water. I never heard music played like that. A tune went through my head, I never heard, you know. I couldn't figure out what it was, but the first thing that came to my mind was that sergeant drowning the day before. They pulled me up, put me out there, pumped the old water out of me and the guy said, "You got to go back in there." I was scared to death though. He said, "We'll watch." They told me what I had to do, I went back on that board, jumped in the water, it was alright.

FK: Steve, earlier, you mentioned that that Thayer Hotel and some of the guys could work there. Did the Army allow you to have other jobs besides your regular duty?

SK: Oh, sure. They didn't care. In fact, we had... On weekends, we'd go down to the city and go down on a dock and unload boxcars, barges and stuff like that, and they paid us. That was one thing about that. I remember when I retired and went for social security, the guy says... He had to come back with the print out and he said, "Did you ever work on a railroad?" I said, "No, I never worked on a railroad." He said, "Well, you're marked down here for working on a railroad." I said, "Well, I don't...." He says, "How about in the Army?" I said, "Well, the only thing I can remember was unloading railroad cars in Bayone New York. He says, "Well that's what it was. They paid you and they took out the social security." That was marked down. Now you see, the government really watches you. But if there was work, you could go and work. A lot of guys were called dogrobbers, they would go and work at different officers' homes. They'd have parties, they'd go up there and serve drinks and stuff like that. But they didn't care about that if you worked, as long as it didn't interfere with your duties.

FK: The other thing you mentioned, you were talking about the cavalry, you said it was all black. Did you mean it was a black regiment?

SK: Yes. I remember that, we'd watch them practice out there on the big field. I never seen horses in step like that, they had the band playing and you know, you'd hear them sergeants hollering and all with the troops, the wheel, right and left and you know all that, them horses, all in step. They were really good. But after awhile, I think they got rid of the horses. I think though after the war ended, I think they went into motorized stuff. But that was some outfit, they had to have probably 150 horses there.

FK: You mean black soldiers or the horses?

SK: No, black soldiers.

FK: They had white officers?

SK: White officers, right.

FK: How about the non-commissioned officers?

SK: They were black. It was a black unit, but white officers, no black officer.

FK: Much contact between the white soldiers and the black soldiers any?

SK: It was no problem. No problem at that time during World War II. We didn't have any... Later they started to segregate them and if it was field artillery, they'd have black later. At that time during the war, there were still black and white. Blacks in their place and whites in our area. Later, they started to change. They had the black and white.

FK: How about recreation, was it strictly white, and strictly black, or was there mixing or what?

SK: No. It was segregated. None of that togetherness. But the blacks, you know how fast they run, they had some good baseball players too. But it seemed like it was the field artillery and the armored force during World War II that had the good basketball teams and baseball teams and stuff like that. I remember the armored force had one guy who was at that time... I remember there was a basketball team called the House of David and they played with the beards, being that this fellow was in the Army, he had to shave that beard off. I never seen them. Him, that Chuck Connors... They had a couple others that could have played pro ball, they were that good and like I said, we had this Harry Boycoff who played center and he was fantastic. In fact, after the war ended, he was playing for the Philadelphia Warriors at that time. They come into Youngstown and played an exhibition game with the

Youngstown Bears. I was sitting in the stands there and I was hollering, "Hey, Harry, Harry." Them guys don't pay any attention, anybody could be hollering "Harry." So then I said, "Hey," I hollered to him in Jewish, "Hey Jewish boy." He turned around and stopped and he looked up and "Steve!", he says. He ran up into them stands, he says, "Come on." He took me down into the dressing room and introduced me to all the players, we sat on the bench, we played, after the game was over, back into the locker room. He said, "We're going downtown." At that time, Youngstown was really open, restaurants and everything. He said, "You're invited." I said, "No, I have to go some place else." I had a commitment. He said, "You're welcome." He was a poor Jewish boy. We had some in our outfit at West Point that were well to do. In fact one I remember had a packing house, another one, his dad, had a factory that made the mattress covers and stuff like that for the Armed Forces.

That was a funny thing. We got along good, like our holidays, they would take our duties, like KP and guard duty and stuff like that. When theirs come around, we did theirs. They helped each other out. I remember a lot of them who lived in Brooklyn and stuff like that. If they had KP and they wanted to go home, well, it was nothing for them to say, "Hey, do my KP, I'll give you \$5." Hey, I wasn't going anywhere, I said, "Hey, \$5 is \$5. I'll do KP on the weekend. There was nobody there. There was fifteen or twenty guys, how many dishes do you have to wash? So that was a break, or do guard duty, which was... We did it two places. We did it on the post and we did it around our area which we carried the clock that had a key, that had about seven stations that you had to hit with the key, through the stables and stuff like that. Then the other place... They'd send us up by truck to the MP and they'd send us out like to guard the railroad station, the tunnel. There was a tunnel that would run through West Point there, down at the bottom of the hill and you had one G.I. on one side of the tunnel and one on the other. If they sabotaged, or blew up the tunnel, then the train couldn't run. We had one sitting up on the hill, but the best part of that was you got three rounds of ammunition and you couldn't load them. I said, "What good was that." You never had a chance to put the three rounds in, but I always had my three rounds in there. If somebody was going to come, I could get my three rounds off. That was really funny. On guard duty during World War II, they wouldn't let you load you rifle and only three rounds to start with. But, it wasn't bad.

FK: Being stationed in the States, did you have any contact with the allied troops or anything? Did you train any



of them at West Point or anything, any contact, or were they all Americans?

SK: No. The only troops we saw was when the war ended, well, the war was still on. They had some Italian prisoners of war. They had a camp up there, Italian and they had some Germans. That was really something. They had that fence around there and you'd see their garbage cans were all marked and you know, all swine food, for pigs and that, they had a clean camp. They really had it good there. They weren't going to try to escape from there because it was really a nice camp, up in the mountains.

FK: Where was this?

SK: At West Point.

FK: Right at West Point?

SK: Well it would be right up in the mountain range. It was right outside of West Point. I don't think fifteen or twenty miles, because we used to go out and fire the guns and have to go through the town of Highland Falls up into the mountains. They had a small, it wasn't a very big Prisoner of War camp.

FK: Could you describe that camp from what you remember of it, for me?

SK: We weren't allowed in there.

FK: From the outside, what you saw?

SK: All there was was a big fence around it and they had at each corner they had a guard in a tower. We would be on the outside, you wouldn't be allowed in there. That's all we'd see. It seemed like the prisoners were well treated. It wouldn't be like our prisoners during World War II, treated over there, badly. Over here, they really had it made. They never wanted to leave there.

FK: Did they have wooden barracks?

SK: Yes. Temporary. I never heard of anybody trying to escape.

FK: You never heard of any?

SK: No.

FK: How many prisoners would you say there were?

SK: I'd say there were three or four hundred there at that

time. We never got to see them too much. West Point actually covers a lot of ground. Everything is government property.

FK: While you were in the service, did you have any contact with U.S.O. shows or anything of that nature?

SK: No. They never had too much of that up there at the Point. We would go to New York City, we'd get tickets for some of the Broadway shows. In fact I went to see Gertrude Lawrence in "Follow the girls", which was very good. You could get tickets, somebody at the Point had tickets for different things, if you wanted to go see them in New York City. I never seen any shows up at the Point. In fact, at Fort McClellan, Alabama, they had one but I never got a chance to see it. I don't even remember who was there. That's all I know about that.

FK: How did rationing affect you being in the military?

SK: Food-wise there, we had no problem. There was a couple funny things when I was... Like Fort Belvedere, Virginia, the kitchen guy, the mess sergeant would say, "I got the truck coming down, we're going to load some flour on there and we're going to take it around and see if any other mess camps there need flour." Well, we'd load fifteen or twenty bags of flour, one hundred pound bags, and go around and that. All them other mess sergeants would laugh, they'd say, "Well, we got the same thing." What was happening, the baker, he wouldn't want to bake that much and they got stuck with a lot of flour so they tried to get rid of it for something else, which they never could. They really had good food. West Point was fantastic food. You had anything you wanted, practically. It was cafeteria style and all you wanted, all the milk you wanted to drink, they made sure you had plenty of food. Well, when I was up in Fort McClellan, the food, you didn't get as much there naturally because at West Point they had the detachment of about only two hundred guys, the mess sergeant got good food. It wasn't too bad there. Other places, I know, the food wasn't as terrific as there.

FK: When you got out of the service in February of 1946, what was your reception back home like? Do you remember?

SK: They were sure glad to see me, my mother and father. Being foreign people, they were really glad that I got home. I remember, they had the camp out here in Pennsylvania and they had a lot of troops over there. They used to come into Youngstown as troops will anyplace, they caused a lot of problems and every time people

would see a soldier, they look at him kind of cross-eyed if he was a ways from downtown. I remember when I got off of the train and I got downtown and I got on the bus, people were looking at me. When I got down there, I lived on Poland Avenue, I got off right there at Caledonia. As soon as I got off the bus, I was home because we lived in an apartment there, right at the corner of Poland Avenue and Caledonia and I got off at the bus and fifteen steps I was home. The first thing I got in the house, I said, "What's there to eat, I'm hungry!" My mother always had something. They were really happy. Then all the rest of the guys started to come home. We'd get together on Saturdays and Sundays and have a good time, start playing ball and everything, organize clubs and then as we got older, guys got married and they went their way. In fact, I don't see too many of them guys that I grew up with, anymore. I got all bunch of new friends. So that's the way it is.

FK: Anything else that comes to mind that you want to tell us about during your time in World War II in the service?

SK: Oh, being that I wasn't overseas, there isn't that much to say. The basic training, being at West Point, there, instructing and stuff like that, but a lot of these guys, well, I wouldn't say fortunate, got to see foreign countries, but they had to fight to see, and there wasn't too much of that, I know. I had a lot of friends that were overseas and... I was one of the fortunate ones staying in this country and had it pretty good. The kids that went over there... But that's about all I know on that, unless you have a question that I can try to answer.

FK: I think I found it rather interesting what you were sharing with me, some of your memorable events and the characters that you met in the service.

SK: Well, the best I can say is me being at the President's funeral. There is not many people that got a chance to be there, because being in the war, if that would have been a peace-time, they would have had the President sitting in Washington. Being that it was war time, it was only top cabinet members which were allowed there because of traveling and stuff like that and our detachment and the cadet corps and some people there, but it was really something. I never seen anything like it.

FK: Did you get to meet anybody else besides Mrs. Roosevelt at that funeral?

SK: No, never. There was a lot of security, just like I

say, I saw the two dogs and we got to really see the property. This house was set up on a high hill and you could look out for long distances. Everything was wooded, but I would say that road that went down, to the railroad must have been a good half mile to three quarters of a mile. It was something when they transferred that body in the casket from the hearse to the caisson. I didn't think them horses were going to get started up that hill, because it seemed like it looked like that casket was really heavy. So I would imagine it would have been copper lined. But it got going.

FK: Thanks.

SK: Okay, Frankie.

END OF INTERVIEW