

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 735

JOHN SAMSA

Interviewed

by

Douglas Silhanek

on

April 18, 1985

JOHN E. SAMSA

John Samsa was born September 18, 1920 in Bessemer, Pennsylvania, the son of Anton and Mary Samsa. He attended Bessemer High School and entered the service in 1942. He served as a liaison pilot in North Africa and the invasion of Italy, flying L4H observation planes. After the service, he earned his Bachelor's degree from Slippery Rock State College and his Master's degree from Westminster College.

Mr. Samsa is currently a guidance counselor at Mohawk High School in Bessemer as well as head basketball coach. He has achieved numerous coaching honors, guided several championship teams, and won over four hundred games. He and his wife Leona have raised five children. John is a member of St. Anthony Catholic Church, the Bessemer American Legion, the National Education Association, Pennsylvania Education Association, and various counselor and coaching organizations.

Douglas M. Silhanek

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN SAMSA

INTERVIEWER: Douglas Silhanek

SUBJECT: Depression, small town life, training, pressures,
missions

DATE: April 18, 1985

SI: This is an interview with John Samsa for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Doug Silhanek, at Mr. Samsa's home, on Thursday, April 18, 1985, at 7:30 p.m.

Tell us something about your parents and family and what you remember most.

SA: As far as my family is concerned, my parents were immigrants, people from Austria. I can't remember exactly the year when they arrived here. When they did arrive, they had no knowledge of the English language. The language that was spoken was Croatian, and they were dependent upon people within the Bessemer area in order to do their translating for them. They settled in the Bessemer area, and I, the youngest of the family group, have two older sisters and an older brother. I, in turn, am the baby in the family as it is.

From the standpoint of age, I was born in 1920, and from the standpoint of early years, we went through some very meaningful early years when we didn't have the problems of the Depression. However, we did run into the Depression era. I find that that was one of the very meaningful times of my lifetime. You learned to really appreciate education, making for our own recreation, and doing a lot of reading as far as recreation was concerned.

As far as we were concerned, the Depression was very meaningful, but it was very worrisome as far as our parents were concerned as well. We actually had a great time with the games that we made up. We didn't have a need for money, just good friendship, camaraderie, and a lot of reading.

SI: What was a typical day like during the Depression in a small town?

SA: Let's take a Monday, for example. During the school time of year on a Monday we would go to school. I think we began at 9:00 and we would go to school until 12:00. Then we would have one hour off for lunch. During that one hour for lunch, we would go home to eat. This is where we had the development of friendships, close friendships, with people within the neighborhood, walking, running home, whatever the situation was. We had the hour off and then we would go back. School would continue until 4:00. Dismissal was at 4:00. Once again if it was a Monday, if we had sports, naturally they would take place after school. We would participate in sports. After the sports practice time, we would go home and eat.

After supper, Monday night was library night. The guys would get together and we would walk up to the library, once again, camaraderie. We would go into the library and select our books, doing it in an orderly fashion. Once again we would return home, once again camaraderie on the way home. Then it would be time to do a little bit of reading.

As far as any homework was concerned, I planned my time quite well where I had study time available at school. So most of my work was done in school, and so consequently I had a lot of time for recreational reading at home. so the recreational reading was at home, and then I would be off to bed.

SI: Did parents put any demands on you because of the Depression, any extra demands?

SA: Not really. There may have been demands on my older brother, but as far as I was concerned personally, no. We worked in the garden, but that was part of living at that time anyhow. It was just a lot of fun as far as I was concerned.

SI: What did you do for a good time? What would you identify as a good time?

SA: Good time . . . Reading was really one of the very important recreational things as far as a good time was concerned. I can remember looking up friends from within the community who would have the Baseball Joe series of books. I would borrow one particular book per week from this particular friend, reading the whole range of the series. To me that was a great thing.

Intermingled with that, we were very active from the standpoint of the sports program. Our total lifetime

seemed to revolve around sports. We would go from season to season, the baseball, the football; and once football was over, we did a lot of ice skating, playing hockey, and the basketball, of course. So good times for us were sports oriented, very, very much so.

SI: What do you remember about the small town life before the war?

SA: Our town before the war, the camaraderie, the fellowship was tremendous. We would go downtown. We had two areas where actually the young people met. We had Rick's dairy in the evenings, and we also had the Isaly Dairy store. The young fellows would go down there and congregate. They would have perhaps a candy bar and a bottle of pop, but that was about the extent of it. It was just intermingling as far as fellowship was concerned. Perhaps we would walk down to Goldendale Creamery, as we called it at that time. It was about a mile walk. We walked down toward the Creamery, just conversation once again, and walk back. It was just plain, ordinary, good conversation.

SI: How about family activities?

SA: As far as the family activity was concerned, I can always remember that we had the game of lotto. It was very similar to bingo nowadays. That was one of the games that we had. We also had something on the order of pinball machines, but not the variety we have nowadays. We could place it on the floor. We played that type of pinball machine. We played cards and once again intermingled with the games, good old conversation.

SI: How about getting closer to the war? What can you remember being the first sign of war or that you would be involved?

SA: On December 7, 1941, I was actually going to Cleveland, Ohio. What I was doing at that particular time was that I was driving our local automobile dealer, John Carlson was his name. He was picking an automobile up at the docks in Cleveland. He was going to drive the new car back to Bessemer. I drove him up to Cleveland, then turned around to return home. On my way back home I heard the announcement over the radio to the effect that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Naturally the excitement was very, very strong.

At that particular time we had a congregating point in Bessemer. It was at this automobile dealer's gasoline station location. We were almost, as young people, in a joyous mood and talking about going into the military and saying, "One, two, three, four," and that particular type of marching command situation. Within our group there must have been perhaps

ten or fifteen talking about getting into the war. Of that particular group I can remember right now, off the top of my head, two of the boys who were kidding around and having a great time that night didn't make it back. They went into the service, into the military, and didn't return. That was my introduction to World War II.

SI: From that point how long did it take before you went in?

SA: I was actually inducted on August 15, 1942. At that particular time we went for our physicals up to Erie, Pennsylvania. We went by rail from New Castle up to Erie. That was when we were inducted into the service, into the Army in my particular case.

SI: What were your feelings about leaving home?

SA: As much as I was a small town boy, very, very apprehensive. I never had really gone away for any extended period of time, so this was going to be a very new experience, very, very new for me.

SI: A little different from that night at the car dealer.

SA: Much so. When the reality of the situation occurred where you are going to be leaving little, old Bessemer and going to some distant place, it sobered you up quite a bit, yes.

SI: What do you think the overall mood of the town was at the outbreak of war?

SA: I think Bessemer was a great, little town. I think from the standpoint of patriotism, we were at the top. We had a great group of young people. As far as the older people were concerned, very civic-minded, united, and just a great town.

SI: Was there some thought about fighting that you might be fighting Germans before Pearl Harbor and then maybe a different change of thought once Pearl Harbor hit?

SA: As far as I can judge with the conversations we had, no. The only thing was that we were in a war situation, and whether they were German or Japanese really didn't matter.

SI: That gives the mood of the town; that's for sure.

SA: Yes.

SI: What about once you got into the service? Trace where you went from basic and then from there.

SA: I went for my basic training down to Fort Benning, Georgia. Actually, I was drafted into the service, but one of my skill areas was a lathe operator. I had just concluded a machinist course. There was a U. S. Army Ordinance outfit that came through at the time, in New Castle, Pennsylvania, and indicated that if you had a skill, conceivably they would take anybody with a skill, you could go into that ordinance battalion.

My start was to go into the 10th Armored Division in ordinance. The base for the 10th Armored Division at that time was Fort Benning, Georgia. That is where I went for my infantry training. I took my basic at Fort Benning. Then while at Fort Benning, they offered certain people within that ordinance battalion the opportunity to go to communication school up in Fort Knox, Kentucky. After I had my basic training, I went up to Fort Knox for what I think was twelve weeks of communication training. It was on radio communication in particular.

While at Fort Knox, the Army was looking for officer candidates. This was excellent timing in my particular case. I interviewed and received the opportunity to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for officer candidate training, which I accepted. I went to officer candidate school and I received my commission as a second lieutenant on July 8, 1943.

Then following the commission I went to flight school as a liaison pilot. I went to Pittsburg, Kansas for flight training. We were flying the reconnaissance planes, low flying Piper Cubs. I went to Pittsburg, Kansas for preliminary flight training. After getting the preliminary work at Pittsburg, Kansas, we returned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for specialized work with field artillery battalions.

I think it was sometime in December of that year, after concluding the training at Fort Sill, that I received orders to go overseas.

SI: Would you say that was all meaningful training?

SA: Excellent. I feel the training that we received in the Army was efficient and well done. Whatever work the Army taught, they most generally used the block style of teaching. By that I mean, they would take one particular subject, concentrate on that subject for x number of days, conclude that, and go into another specialized area. To me it worked very efficiently, and practically everything that we were taught was very meaningful.

SI: Can you give me an example?

SA: Yes, I can give you one, good example. During flight training--this was in the advanced flight training at Fort Sill--one of the maneuvers that we had to learn was . . . This was in the hills of Oklahoma. They had roads up there and curves in the roads. One of the things we were taught to do was to make one wheel landings on these curved roads so that we could go ahead and actually make a landing on a curved road in place of the conventional straight ahead landing. We often thought that it was just a lot of useless work, but sure enough, there was the occasion in France where we were having difficulties in finding landing strips.

One of the landing strips was in a very, very confined area. The only way we could get into this confined area was to "slip" the ship down, the aircraft down, in a very sharp descent. That is another thing that we learned, sharp descent and then coordinate the movement of the plane so you land on one wheel and make the turn at the same time. So one of the useless things that we thought we were getting in flight training turned out to be very, very meaningful in that situation. I think in that particular landing strip, three pilots "washed their planes out" trying to get into that confined area. The Army seemed to have covered everything with our training.

SI: As you were going through that did you ever get the feeling that you were being trained for something special, or was it just basic training that everybody was going through equally?

SA: No, I thought it was very basic. In fact when we got our orders to report to Africa, on the ship going to Africa we were talking about getting advanced training overseas that would prepare us for actual combat. On the ship we learned of the allied invasion of Anzio. The Anzio landing was just another part of the war as far as we were concerned. On the ship we were actually talking about where we were going to get advanced training. Somebody volunteered the information that there wasn't going to be anymore advanced training, that we were going to be getting into the real thing. I personally felt that, no, we weren't going directly to combat. As it turned out, the announcement that there was a landing at Anzio eventually turned out to be the area we actually went into combat.

SI: When you heard, what was that feeling like when you heard you were going?

SA: It was another military exercise as far as we were concerned. When we got to Africa, we were located in an assembly area. No one seemed to know where we were actually supposed to go, what we were supposed to be doing. We were just in a staging

area there. Quite by accident, one of our pilots walking down the street in the city of Oran . . . It's located in Algeria. He met a fellow officer and they got into a conversation. Just by coincidence that officer said that they had been looking for the replacement pilots. Very promptly, I think they got us orders. I think within the day, within the next twenty-four hours, we were on our way to Algiers. In Algiers we were laid over there for perhaps one night. Then from Algiers we flew over into Naples. From Naples we eventually went to Anzio. It was a very, very quick process once they found us.

SI: You weren't with the first wave in Anzio. What wave were you in? Were you the backup?

SA: As far as Anzio was concerned, it was a stalemate when we got there, in fact, quite a meaningful experience. Flying up to Anzio we had quite an experience. There were three or four planes flying to Anzio. What we had to do was fly on a compass heading over water a certain distance because the German troops, of course, were occupying the land immediately south of Anzio. We had to go out to sea and then back into land in order to make it safely.

Over water we were challenged on our way up to Anzio by a U. S. Navy destroyer. They challenged us with a shot indicating that we should shoot the colors of the day with a Veñ pistol. The lead plane was the only one that had that Veñ pistol and the colors of the day. Evidently, the destroyer personnel didn't see it, so they started to fire at us. It was a matter of maneuvers. Once again it was something that we learned within our flight training. We got down close to the water and actually flew a zigzag course getting to Anzio.

SI: What was your mission?

SA: At that particular time all we were doing was that I was going to the air section of the 3rd Infantry Division and the two other pilots were going to the 45th Division. We were replacements. They needed pilots up there, so that was what we were doing. We were going in to replace the pilots.

SI: Then there would be new orders from there then.

SA: It was a rather unique situation. They were looking for us in one way because they were short of pilots. We had our orders, of course. When I got there at Anzio, I know that I made two passes at the airstrip when I was landing. Little did I know that the ground personnel there was angry with me due to the flat nature of Anzio. By making two passes of the airstrip I gave the Germans an opportunity

to zero in on the airstrip. I got an okay. No sooner had I landed, they told me right off the bat how I had blundered as far as my approach was concerned. That was one of my first learning situations.

In addition to the firing by the U. S. Navy destroyer at us, we no sooner got onto the airstrip that there was incoming artillery fire. I wondered what we were going to do then. Fortunately, there were dugouts. One of the pilots who was there at Anzio said, "Come on with me." So the two of us went into this particular dugout. The Germans at that particular time were making a move trying to force the air personnel out of that particular location. They moved a few tanks in and really put us under fire. Little did I know what they were really trying to do. Some of the old hands there more or less indicated what was going on.

As it turned out that afternoon, the very afternoon that I got into the airstrip, the tanks came in, tried to move us out. They were unsuccessful at that particular time. That evening at night we got orders to abandon the airstrip, and then on foot, go back to a new location. That was what we did. Foot movement was in deep mud, and my introduction to military combat was very quick and almost breathtaking.

SI: Did you abandon the planes and everything?

SA: Yes, we left the planes. We were left with the opinion that if the Germans took the airstrip, it would be a big loss. We would have to have our planes replaced. As it turned out we went back to the same location. That morning we returned to the strip; everything was okay.

SI: What were you flying?

SA: The designation was L4H. It was just a Piper Cub. It was an observation plane.

SI: After that where did you go?

SA: From Anzio . . . Let me go back. This is something that might be meaningful. I often at times think of it. When I first got to Naples, we went to the landing strip where General Mark Clark operated from. In fact I think the afternoon when I came in, General Clark, for some reason or other, was taking off in a plane. He waved to us as we came in. I thought that was really great. Here is a young second lieutenant and there is the highly regarded General Clark.

I don't remember what the time frame was, but the night

we came to Naples, to that airfield, we were invited-- I think three of us second lieutenants-- to this big meeting. We were wondering what it was all about. Here one of the generals, an adjutant I think who was working with General Clark, called all of the officers at the airstrip and gave an informative talk on the bombing that was going to take place at Mount Cassino. I thought it was really something that they would give that confidential information to young second lieutenants. That was the type of situation we got into. I thought I ran into some great, great people.

SI: Clark was in charge of the early invasion and operations then.

SA: He was in charge of the 5th Army. When we went to Anzio, our next objective, of course, was going to be Rome. In our stalemate of Anzio there was some bloody fighting that went on at that particular time and very stressful because we couldn't do much of anything. We were confined to that particular area and the Germans would try to push us out to sea on occasion. There was some intense fighting that went on. We felt--when I say we, we who were flying--that we were safer up in the air flying than the ground personnel.

At any rate, at that particular time when we really made the push on Rome, I was hospitalized back in Naples. I had gone by hospital ship back to Naples. I was confined to the hospital for maybe about a week or ten days. I had developed pneumonia. While I was there in Naples, the move was made on Rome. I joined our particular air section once they got to Rome.

After we got to Rome we were stationed there for a while. Then we got orders to go back to Naples and do some additional training. Our training down there was flying off of these aircraft carriers. They were makeshift aircraft carriers, small ones. Then we learned that something else was going to be coming up, the invasion of southern France. That was going to be the next meaningful thing after Rome. We returned to Naples and had additional flight training flying off of the aircraft carriers.

The one thing that I really missed was while we were getting ready to go in on our . . . While we were waiting on the aircraft carrier to leave from Naples, going on the invasion of southern France, for some reason or other I had to go report below deck. During that time interval when I had to report below deck, Prime Minister Churchill was making the rounds in the harbor waving to all of the allied personnel. I was getting ready to go on the invasion and I missed seeing Prime Minister Churchill. It was very distressing to me when I learned I had missed seeing this great man.

We left for our invasion of southern France. Our invasion of southern France was in the Marseille area. We were expecting a really difficult time of it. As it turned out everything went quite well. I think we received perhaps but one round of artillery fire from the ground forces there. The enemy aircraft came over, but they didn't actually do any bombing or spraying or anything, so our invasion of southern France was very successful.

One of the dominant things I can remember was that on our way up to southern France on the aircraft carrier, we were prepped on the area that we were going to be going into. It was information on what we were going to encounter. Everything went like clockwork. We saw, by way of air photos, what we were going to be getting into.

As far as our aircraft was concerned, I had the good fortune of being the flight commander responsible for all of the aircraft taking off and actually had control of the aircraft carrier for that period of time we were taking off, which was very meaningful to me as an individual. We all got off. We had no accidents. We all flew into our assembly area, landed, and then saw German prisoners being captured almost immediately. There was the stockade area where the prisoners were being assembled. It was quite breathtaking as far as I was concerned.

SI: You started getting a better feeling about the war then.

SA: Oh, yes, very successful at that time.

SI: What about getting closer to the end? How far did you push and when did it end for you?

SA: In southern France we were just making what I thought was gigantic strides. We were going north, and I think it was in Montélimar, if I remember correctly, where we encountered a tremendous force of Germans. At that particular time these enemy forces were caught in movement on roads. I don't know where they were going, but I can remember flying into this particular area and surveying all of the damage that was done by our allied forces to this particular group of Germans.

We destroyed a tremendous amount of equipment at that time. In fact with the artillery pieces of the Germans, they were using animals at that time to pull the equipment. So we felt things were going badly for them and they were starting to wear down. They didn't have the necessary motor driven equipment. It all looked very, very good for us at Montélimar at that particular time.

SI: When was that? Was it late in 1944?

SA: August 29, 1944, yes, that was the day. In fact that was the very day . . . I didn't have a flight mission, and our fire direction center called me up and said, "Germans are in trouble. Why don't you go on up and take a look?" In fact, that was the tip-off. So I went up on a flight to survey the damage at that particular time. We had a good feeling at that time, that things were going our way.

SI: Getting closer to the end . . .

SA: We were progressing up toward actually German territory as such. We got up to Strasbourg right at the Rhine River, and we came into this one, beautiful airfield. The Germans had to leave quickly, and they had wired the field just in case they had to leave so they could possibly blow the airfield up, but we moved in so fast that they couldn't do any damage. We were just alerted to the fact that whenever you land at this particular airfield to be very, very careful. Once you land, survey the area and make sure that you are very careful wherever you walk and inspect things closely.

We went into this airfield, and everything was in good order. This was an experience that was very meaningful to me. There was a place of business; I think it was on the order of an inn. It was located adjacent to this airfield. We commandeered that particular home and business as sleeping quarters. We walked into the business place, and this man came to greet us. He spoke to us in English. Here he had actually lived in the Pittsburg area prior to the war for a period of time, then had gone back to Strasbourg and was going to live off of some of the money he had made over here in the States. Of course, he was very, very cordial. In fact he is the one who indicated to us how he disliked Hitler.

As a resident there on German holidays, whatever they were, they had to display the Nazi flag and a picture of Hitler in the window of their home or business place. That was absolutely a requirement, an absolute law. In fact, I asked him, "Do you still have the Nazi flag?" He said, "Yes." So we made an exchange there. I gave him cigarettes. He gave me the flag. I have that as a so-called souvenir plus the picture that he had to put in the window of Hitler. I brought it back home and still have both items.

At Strasbourg, on some of our flight missions, we were looking across the Rhine River and we could see the Germans over there in this one factory area. It was quite a distance. I know they were doing work with their locomotives. They were switching railroad cars and so on. We didn't have the artillery fire to reach them. For some reason we were unable to call in the Air Force planes at that particular time, but it looked so simple at that particular time that I felt our

allied forces could have just gone across the Rhine and made our push. We could really have moved them.

As it turned out we were at Strasbourg. Then our particular air section and our field artillery battalion were ordered to go into the Colmar pocket in a southerly direction. The French were in need of some help down there. So we went on detached service, just this particular regimental team, our battalion of artillery plus our air section. We went down to the Colmar pocket and were doing some fighting in that area. In the meantime, the Battle of the Bulge developed up north, so we were actually in the Colmar pocket at the time of the Battle of the Bulge.

What happened to me, which will more or less sum things up from the standpoint of the combat situation . . . While down in the Colmar pocket, I had a . . . It wasn't an accident. It actually turned out to be my last combat flight. I was up above the mountains at about 4,000 or 5,000 feet in altitude, and all of a sudden my propeller stopped up there. I had to make a forced landing in no-man's-land. Fortunately it was smooth enough that we were able to affect a good landing. I had my observer go out. We didn't have any self-starters. You had to go out and spin the prop. He spun the prop. It popped fire and then hurriedly we flew out of there. Fortunately we didn't get hit by any enemy fire.

Following that particular landing I was . . . All of the pilots were asked to go for a periodical physical check. At that particular time, after that flight, the doctors felt that I needed a rest. That was when I went back down to Marseille. Eventually I went into a hospital situation there, recuperation, shall we say from anxiety and stress and all. Then I returned to the States.

SI: So it wound down from there.

SA: You could see it was on the way, yes.

SI: When you were in Rome and going through France, are there things that you can remember enjoying, not from the tourist standpoint?

SA: The thing that I enjoyed was living in a private home with an Italian family. It had been commandeered with an Italian family, very nice people. It wasn't too far out of the city of Rome itself. On occasion we would go into Rome, and, of course, we would go to St. Peter's Cathedral. I went to St. Peter's I don't know how many times. It was such a pleasure to be able to go there and just walk around and see all of the cultural paintings, statues, and all and the buildings in the St. Peter's square area. It was so

meaningful. We would be passing the coliseum whenever we would be going into Rome.

SI: How about home? What did you miss from home the most?

SA: Naturally parents and family. I know from the standpoint of my mother in particular that she was a real worrier. Of course, she knew that I was in a combat situation, and it worried her tremendously. The letters would come very regularly, and I tried to correspond in a regular fashion myself.

One thing that stands out in my mind was the fact that they sent me, of all things--how it ever got to me I'll never know--hard salami. It got to me. Why it wasn't intercepted I'll never know, but I think I was either in Italy or in southern France. I think I was in southern France when it got to me, but they were always . . . They didn't send too many things to me from the standpoint of edible things. It was just the matter of regular letters.

SI: Newspapers or anything?

SA: No, just the mail.

SI: Did the community do anything for the servicemen in terms of any kinds of care packages? Do you remember anything like that?

SA: They did things, but I can't remember that I received any of those particular projects that they were working on. I know that some of the other people commented that they had received certain things from home, but I can't recall that I did.

SI: What about coming home? What was the feeling like coming home?

SA: As I indicated before, I was hospitalized in Marseille. I returned to the United States on a hospital ship. I think it was called the Blanche F. Sigmund. It was named after a nurse. It was a hospital ship. We left from Marseille and we were going on the southernly route. It was going to take us . . . It was a converted liberty ship incidentally. One thing they told us was that it would take approximately two to three weeks to get home by the route we were going, which was going to seem like an eternity. On our way home we heard V-E Day, which was so fulfill . . .

SI: Like medicine?

SA: Yes, indeed. The route that we were taking, the seas were calm and sunny and so pleasant from the standpoint of the route that we were following.

One of the distressing things that I encountered there on the way home was this one friendship that I developed with this Army captain. He was an engineer, and he worked primarily with the railroads. What he did, I don't know where it was in France, but he was actually working on this particular railroad bed and struck a mine. He stepped on a mine and it blew one of his legs off. Then when he fell, he fell on his other leg, struck another mine and it blew the other leg off. His attitude was one of . . . It was just a great attitude. It didn't seem to bother him that much. It was very distressing to me as an individual. I developed some very warm friendships at that particular time.

V-E Day on the way home, of course, medicine . . . Then we got to our port of entry and that was Charleston, South Carolina. Then from Charleston I was sent to Wakeman General Hospital, Camp Atterbury in Indiana, and that is eventually where I was separated from the service.

SI: How about coming back to Bessemer? What was the mood of the town that you can remember?

SA: I was fortunate in that the particular time when I came home a friend--Bill Pelto, a U. S. Air Force pilot--was home on leave at the same time. The two of us in particular got together from the standpoint of recreational activities, golfing, tennis, and what not. The mood of the town . . . Once again, Bessemer was always great during those early formative war years. People were warm and friendly and wanting to do practically anything they possibly could to make your stay at home comfortable, recreational, and do practically anything for you. It was just a great, great town. I always felt that Bessemer was one of the warmest places that a person could ever live in. It was just a great place. So the thirty days that Bill and I experienced together . . . We refer to them as the golden thirty days. They were really great.

SI: How about the Depression now that the Depression was over, since the war? Did you notice that once you got home and got settled, was the town booming or was it better?

SA: Oh, yes. From the standpoint of the Depression that was history; that was behind us. Everybody had, shall we say, a very bright outlook and was going on to bigger and better things. I think at that particular time our town leaders . . . Archie Shoup was the chief of police; Carl Montgomery was the mayor, and they seemed to be like a nucleus for civic activity. They were getting things going as far as community action was concerned. They did so much for our town, two

of the great people in the history of Bessemer.

SI: Is there anything important that we may have left out?

SA: I like to look upon World War II as one of the very most meaningful times of my life for this reason; from the standpoint of training it was excellent; from the standpoint of unity, unification, it was there. We all had a goal; we were in the war. We had an enemy to defeat and we were going to do it.

I think I am one of the very, very fortunate individuals who came in contact with all good, genuine people. They were working toward the end of winning the war, and it turned out to be a very efficient time operation. Everybody was working toward that common goal. There was none of the backstabbing that we encountered once we got back into civilian life, as though somebody was trying to hold you back if you were advancing or progressing. It was very, very meaningful. That was one of the main things that I experienced.

We all worked together. I met great, wonderful people, and the thing that I as an individual found out was that I most certainly wanted to get the baccalaureate degree. That was uppermost in my mind. I had only a high school education up until the war. I was fortunate in encountering a group of educated people. Almost all of them were college graduates as such and made me feel very, very insecure with my limited training. That was the one thing that I wanted, education. Fortunately, after the war with the GI bill, I was fortunate enough to be able to go through college on the GI bill. That was another very, very meaningful thing as far as World War II was concerned.

SI: So you think the Depression followed by the war was all good things.

SA: Absolutely.

SI: It would prepare you for just about anything.

SA: Yes. I think that our particular generation was very fortunate in one respect. It was a very, very meaningful lifetime from the standpoint that we were a very fairly . . . It was a very worthy living situation prior to the Depression. Then we had the Depression and we went through that in fine style. Then we went into World War II and with World War II, the unification, the training.

It was an adventure in one respect. Going into World War II especially in a combat situation where men are shooting at you and you know you are living on a day by day basis, we all lived

in that fashion too. We didn't know whether we would be back the next day, so we made the most of each particular day. The camaraderie was great. Every night in combat, a group of us would be getting together, talking, singing, playing cards.

I can remember some of the people. I can remember one lawyer in particular who was within our group. He came from New York City. Another was from New York state. There was another individual who was a farmer from the South Carolina area. This interaction, interchange of conversation with these people, was an education in itself. They were just great people. We were fortunate. I was fortunate to have had such a great experience.

END OF INTERVIEW