

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Lisbon Rememberances--World War II

Personal Experience

O.H. 1249

RALPH B. MCDEVITT

Interviewed

by

Gene Krokty

on

July 15, 1989

RALPH MCDEVITT

Ralph "Mickey" McDevitt joined the Navy with his parents permission in 1942 at 17 years of age. He has been connected with the services in one way or another ever since. After making a career of the Navy, he has worked the last 12 years as a Veterans Affairs Representative in Columbiana County.

After completing basic training, Mr. McDevitt was assigned to a World War I vintage destroyer that was pressed into escort duty for convoys taking fuel and other supplies to England, Russia, etc. When the Germans surrendered, he was reassigned to a new destroyer and sent to the Pacific, where he was involved in the Battle for Okinawa.

When McDevitt was discharged, he returned to Lisbon and finished high school and attended college. In 1949, he re-entered the Navy, making it his career. He is currently associated with the Columbiana County Veterans Services Office, assisting veterans in getting benefits. He has been married for 38 years to the former Anne Muntean, and they have two children and two grand-children.

McDevitt's hobbies include music, reading, and sports of all kinds. He's active in both the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign War, having been commander of The VFW in Lisbon. He has also held county and district offices in the Veterans of Foreign War. He is also a member of the Eagles, the Elks, and the Disabled American Veteran's Group.

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Lisbon Remembrances--World War II

INTERVIEWEE: RALPH B. MCDEVITT

INTERVIEWER: Gene Krotky

SUBJECT: Navy, destroyers built in World War I, but used in World War II, German submarines, escort duty, attitudes of young Lisbon volunteers, Japan at war's end

DATE July 15, 1989

K: This is an interview with Mr. Ralph McDevitt for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Remembrances of Lisbon--World War II segment, by Gene Krotky, in Lisbon, Ohio, on July 15, 1989, at 2:30 p.m.

Tell me what you remember of your family. I know that you were born and raised here in Lisbon, and your family has been here for a number of years.

M: Okay. I was born in Lisbon in 1925, on May 29. My dad was Raymond McDevitt, [and] my mother was Dorothy Brown. I was born on Maple Street. My mother still lives there today. She's 82 years old. My dad died in January, 1965. My grandfather, Ruben McDevitt, was born shortly after the Civil War, I believe, on a farm down south of Lisbon in Wayne township. My grandfather, Walter Brown, and my grandmother, Flora Brown, lived on Washington Street in downtown Lisbon. That's where my mother was born. That would be right across the street from what, at that time, was Tolson's Garage.

K: You graduated from high school here in Lisbon, when?

M: Well, I was supposed to graduate in 1943, but in 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor--I was 16--I was a junior. So at that time, I decided that I would like to go into the Navy as soon as I could, which would have been on my seventeenth birthday. And so, I quit school at the end of my junior year and went into the Navy on June 4, 1942. I was in Great Lakes, Illinois, and that's where I started boot camp.

Naturally, my dad and my mother didn't want me to go into the service. My dad had lost a brother in World War I, and he at least wanted me to finish my high school education. He was afraid if I didn't, I would never get a high school diploma. My dad had a fifth grade education, and education meant quite a bit to him because he had been a laborer in different factories around Lisbon all his life. That's all he knew and all that he could do. So, he was really upset that I didn't complete my high school education before going into the service.

I went to Great Lakes and started boot camp in June of 1942. I think at that time, boot camp was cut short to five weeks, because they needed the men in the fleet and needed them at sea. I got out of boot camp [and] went to torpedo school in Newport, Rhode Island. Covington Bay, I believe they called it, in Newport, Rhode Island. [I] went to torpedo school for four months. When I graduated torpedo school, I was assigned to a destroyer; the U.S.S. Upshur, the DD-144. Destroyers are numbered one and on up, and by now, they're up into the 1100s. At that time, the Upshur was built in 1916. And then after World War I, sometime during the 1920s, they put it in the back bay in Philadelphia. [They] put it in the Red Lead Row, and then when the war broke out, they drug it out and fixed it up. We were mostly on North Atlantic convoy duty from the time I went aboard in 1942 until after the war was over in Europe. That's what the Upshur was used for. We would sail out of Boston or New York, and sail up north into the North Atlantic. Sometimes there would be ships stopped in Greenland [or] ships stopped in Iceland, but mostly they were headed for France, Murmansk, Russia and places like that. They used the destroyers for escorts for convoy duty. Anything that would float they would put in convoys, because they needed the space. They needed to get the material overseas, they needed to get supplies over there. They'd take some of these ships that were 40 [or] 50 years old, and maybe it would only sail five knots. That's all they could make would be five knots. That would be the speed of your convoy. So, it would take 21 [or] 22 days just to get to England traveling at that speed. At that time, the German submarines were pretty thick in the North Atlantic.

I can recall one convoy that I was on. We left the states with 80-some ships and arrived over in England with, I think it was, 37 [or] 38 ships. [That] is all that we got across. In a convoy like that, some of these older ships. . . . If they developed engine trouble, they'd keep falling back. You couldn't leave an escort with them 'cause there wasn't enough to go around. So then that night, the German sub would knock that ship off.

We had all types of ships--tankers, troop ships--[and] all types of supplies. They were all headed for England and countries on the other side of the ocean. One time we were refueling, and the water was so rough that we had to refuel astern rather than refueling along side, which was the normal operation. So when we went to refuel, we pulled a bit out of the foscle, we were putting a line on there. And the second time around, we put it around the number one gun mount. We got the refueling done, but we messed the mount up, so we had to pull into Londonderry, Ireland for two weeks. We spent two weeks in Londonderry, Ireland for repairs.

Then on the way back, sometimes you'd take. . . . I remember that time we picked up eight or 10 tankers and escorted them to Aruba down in South America, to get fuel. From Aruba, they would bring fuel up and drop it off in Norfolk, [Virginia].

- K: Now, where were they getting the fuel, out of Mexico?
- M: No. The fuel was coming from Curaco and Aruba and down there.
- K: They had refineries there?
- M: Well, evidently, yeah. I think they had refineries there, because that's where these tankers would get filled up. We'd drop them off on the East coast on the way back.
- K: See, I don't think they were drilling there. I wonder where they were getting the oil that they were storing there.
- M: I don't know.
- K: I'd never heard that.
- M: I never gave it a thought. I'm almost sure. . . .
- K: The Mexicans had found oil by then. Of course, the United States was drilling a lot of oil.

M: I'm almost sure that that's where . . . there were fuel docks there, and I'm almost sure that the tankers. . . . Maybe the tankers--no, they wouldn't have been hauling the fuel from England.

K: No. They'd be taking it to Europe.

M: Right, right.

K: Did you ever have any contact with the Russians when you were carrying those?

M: No, never did. I never met a Russian during the war. Nope, I had no contact at all with them.

Most of the time in the Atlantic, that's what. . . . The ship that I was on, that's what we did was convoy duty. And then, in June. . . .

K: How did you watch for the subs since you didn't have very advanced radar?

M: The radar wasn't very much advanced, and we had what they call sonar. And that wasn't nearly as advanced as it is now. So mostly, we had lookouts and we had what they call the crow's nest. It's similar to the crow's nests on the old sailing ships, it was on the mast. It was a platform, and you were assigned to watch up there for a half hour, and then, you'd be relieved. I remember when I first started on that watch, it took me half the time to get up there. I was scared to death. And then by the time I'd get up there and hang on with both hands and get the strap around me, it'd be time to come down.

K: Yeah, I wouldn't like that myself. That's not nice.

M: So then, when the war was winding down in Europe--well not winding down, but the Navy's part of it was winding down after Normandy--I was transferred from the Upshur. I was transferred to San Diego, California to go to advanced torpedo school. From there, I was assigned to a new ship, a new destroyer, which was the U.S.S. Massey, DD-778. I put the Massey in commission, in Seattle, Washington. That's where they built it, at the Todd Shipyards in Seattle, Washington. At that time, the yards were working three shifts around the clock, night and day, and one of the people that played an important part in the shipyards was, naturally, Rosie the Riveter. She was . . . Rosie had a lot to do with winning the war, getting the ships ready to go, and working on the ships that were hit when they come back in.

We left the Todd Shipyards, went on a shake down cruise back down to San Diego, came back, and went into Bremerton, Washington. From there, we took off for the other side of the Pacific. I believe we stopped in Honolulu and Pearl Harbor for a few days, and we picked up a convoy in the water. . . . We went from there to Guadalcanal. Of course, Guadalcanal was secured by that time. I mean, the war was a lot farther north. We took this convoy down there--I can't recall what for--but, from there we went to Ulithi. Ulithi was the island where the fleet was assembling for the invasion of Okinawa. Iwo Jima was secure, so the fleet was assembling at Ulithi. I can remember when we pulled into Ulithi, it was nothing but ships for as far as the eye could see. [There were] ships for miles and miles and miles.

One thing I remember, as we were pulling in, we went along side the U.S.S. Franklin, which was the aircraft carrier number 13. The Franklin had just been hit. She was burnt. It looked like . . . when you looked at the Franklin, you wondered how it could ever be still afloat. And at that time, Bill Hafley had been on the Franklin. He flew off the Franklin. He was assigned to that ship. Naturally, I don't think. . . . The planes were airborne when the Franklin got hit. But I didn't know Hafley was on there at that time, either. I've talked to him since, and he was on there.

So, they assembled the fleet at Ulithi to go into Okinawa, which fortunately was the last battle of the Pacific. We left Ulithi, and we took off for Okinawa. We hit Okinawa [on] April, 1, which was Easter Sunday, 1945. And at that time, most of the destroyers were used for what they call radar picket duty. There were 16 radar picket stations around Okinawa, starting out at the North, one, two, three. Each station was manned by at least one destroyer. Sometimes there'd be two or three destroyers, depending on how tough it seemed it was going to be that day. But our job was to intercept planes coming from Japan that were coming to Okinawa to dive on our fleet and sink the ships that were in Buckner Bay and so forth. We lost--I forget the total--something like 20-some destroyers. I think 30-some were damaged at the Battle of Okinawa. I think it was the first time in history that after the first two weeks of battle, the Navy lost more men than the Army and the Marine Corps put together, which don't seem right.

So then, the ship I was on was credited for knocking down nine Kamikazes--that's what they called the suicide planes. Some of our destroyers were credited with over 20 kills on Kamikazes. What they would do [is] they would dive on you, and when they started down and

dive like that, even with all your gun strength on them, it would be tough to knock them down. Some of them would get through and land on the ship, a human bomb. Then they would . . . if they hit the boiler room, the boilers would burst and you'd have fires. And the ship would either sink or it would be crippled so you couldn't use it again.

K: Did they (Kamikazes) have a favorite time of day when they liked to hit?

M: I think maybe in the evening, I think would probably have been the . . . . At sunset and sunrise was two times that you had to really be careful. You always went to sunrise readiness and sunset readiness, so you were more . . . . You were looking for them more at that time than any other. Another thing, too, if there was a bright sun, they'd always come out of the sun. You were looking into the sun, which made sense, because it would be harder to see.

Then after Okinawa was over, the ship that I was on was part of the escorts to take the troops into Japan itself.

K: The occupation.

M: Occupation troops, right. So we escorted them in, and then we stayed in Japan for three or four more months [doing] different escort duties. Mostly, we carried mail, from Yokohama to Wakayama and different places. We'd get a load of mail, and we'd carry it from one port to another.

K: Even though you were in the Navy, were you attached to MacArthur then?

M: No. We were the 7th Fleet, I believe. I suppose we might have been under MacArthur. He was the supreme commander, and he was the one that rebuilt Japan, you know. He had overall responsibility, so we may of been attached to his command.

K: Did you ever see him?

M: No, I never saw him. I saw his plane later when I was in Guam, in 1951. His plane came down to Guam and landed at the airport down there, you know, but I never seen MacArthur.

K: Did you go to any of the U.S.O. shows or any of that kind of thing that the big battleships got?

M: No, we didn't get that. We were too busy for that. We were too small, actually, to bring them aboard.



- K: Yeah.
- M: But I think that . . . we might of when we were in--I told you we went to the Solomon Islands there, Tulagi and down in there. I think maybe Bob Hope had a troop down in there then, but we didn't see it.
- K: What did you do for relaxation when you did get liberty, or did you not get much liberty?
- M: You know, I just happened to think of that. We put the ship in commission in Seattle, [and we] went to Pearl Harbor. From Pearl Harbor [we went] to Solomon Islands. When we left Pearl Harbor--that would have been probably February, 1945. Hardly anyone went ashore in Tulagi. From Tulagi we went to Ulithi. From Ulithi we went to Okinawa. And Okinawa lasted from like April until August. Very, very few guys got off that ship all that time, from February till August, because you took on your supplies. You took on your fuel. You took on ammunition, and we never tied up to a port. The only thing we tied up to was another ship when we came into the bay to get more supplies. So probably from February till Okinawa was over, we didn't get off. Some got off . . . I did get off at Okinawa when the battle was over. We went over to look around. They had everything secured, but they had things roped off and there were live rounds laying around, so I turned around and got back on board ship, and I didn't go back no more. I didn't go ashore again until we got in Japan. And Japan was such at that time when we went in there, too, that you had to be real careful. You just couldn't walk around Japan, you know, and go anywhere you wanted to, because the Japanese were liable to get you. Still, you had to be very careful.
- K: Were the Japanese people not happy that the war was over? I understand in Germany, many of the German POWs even wanted to go home to the United States with the soldiers when they went. They were hoping the soldiers would bring them to the United States. The Japanese weren't happy?
- M: No. The Japanese wouldn't have anything to do with you at that time, from the way I recall, when the war was first over. Whether they were more scared of you or. . . I don't know. I think the Japanese people were ready to quit. I mean, I think that the average Japanese person had had enough of the war. They gave up a lot, too. It was tough living for them. I think they more or less were . . . they didn't have anything to do with us, what little bit I had contact with them. I don't know about the occupational troops that were there. I have no idea how they got along with them.

K: You were on that ship for so long, and all we hear in Vietnam is how unhappy the soldiers were, the AUS soldiers, and that they weren't really very patriotic or whatever. How'd you keep up morale on the ship for all those months? Or wasn't it a problem? Everybody was just. . . ?

M: I think morale was probably a problem, but I think that you just realized that, "Hey, you're here and you have a job to do. You're not going to get out of here till the job's done. You might as well work at it. You might as well do the best you can, because we're in this thing. There's 350 of us on this ship, and none of us is going back unless we all get back. And if we don't do a year here or six months and go home, we're here till it's over!" Everybody wasn't happy. I mean, you didn't walk around with a smile on your face all the time, but that was just the way it was. It was a fact of life.

K: Did you feel that you had the support of the American people, or did you know that there were people back home who were dissenters in the war and that kind of thing or not?

M: No, I don't think we worried about it. I think we more or less assumed that we had the support of the majority of the people, because your family was behind you and. . . .

K: Did you get lots of mail and everything?

M: We got V-mail, what they call Victory mail. We got mail quite frequently. That was a big morale factor. If someone didn't get a letter from a girlfriend or a wife or something like that. Then, you could always tell when the mail came in, who got mail and who didn't.

K: You didn't have any Jane Fonda back home running around making speeches?

M: No. No. We had several "Dear John" letters in the mail, but no Jane Fondas, no.

K: Nobody so criticizing of the war?

M: The only one we did have was Tokyo Rose, who was broadcasting out of Tokyo.

K: Did you ever hear any of her broadcasts?

M: Oh, definitely.

K: Tell me about it.

M: We looked forward to hearing Tokyo Rose. She played good music. She played the top tunes that were being played in the States. I don't know how they got them. Her big thing was to try to break your morale down. She would say things like. . . . Well, even when the Japs realized that they were going to lose the war at Okinawa there. . . . Like I told you, our destroyers were bearing the brunt of the attacks from the suicide plane. She'd get on the air and say, "Well the battleship sailors of the American Navy might see Tokyo, but the destroyer sailors will never see Tokyo, because they'll all be dead." Then, she would spin a real top tune, you know. Maybe earlier in the war she might have hurt morale some, but at that time, she didn't hurt morale.

K: You knew the United States would win the war by that time?

M: We knew that they couldn't turn us back then. We were almost positive. So, no matter what she had to say. . . .

K: Did she ever mention your ship by name?

M: I think she did. She had them all.

K: Yeah, that's what I understand.

M: I think she did mention our ship a couple times. She would mention ships that got hit, you know. "Well, we got the U.S.S. Drexler," or, "We got the U.S.S. Laffie last night," or something like that.

K: Did you believe her when you heard that or not?

M: Well, yeah, because we were seeing it, so we knew that their information was real good, yeah.

K: How did they get that information? Was their intelligence that sharp?

M: It must of been, you know. It must have been. They must have known every ship that was out there, probably. We knew everything about them, too. But their intelligence was really top drawer, really good.

K: What do you remember about the end of the war, where you were when the war ended? What do you remember about it?

M: When the war ended, which I guess that would be V-J Day, I was on the destroyer, the U.S.S Massey DD-778, at Okinawa. The Japanese had agreed to surrender.

Negotiations were being made for two or three weeks. There were rumors out that they were going to surrender any day now. There was also people who thought the war would last until Christmas. One evening, I'd say 8 o'clock at night, something like that, we were standing up on the foscle. I was there with several of my buddies, and we were just talking back and forth. One would say, "Well, I think the war will be over in a couple weeks." And another fellow would say, "Well, I think it'll go till Christmas." And so, the first thing you know, we started betting. This friend of mine that I remember from . . . he was from Colorado. He was second class boatswain's mate, and I can't recall his name. He bet something like \$100 that the war would last till Christmas. While we were standing there, within the half-hour, one of the radio men came up from the radio shack and said, "Guess what? The war's over. The Japanese have signed a peace treaty."

And at that time in Okinawa, there was hundreds of ships in Buckner Bay and all these soldiers and Marines on the land. All of a sudden, all of the ships started firing their guns. People just went wild. Our captain on our ship passed the word over the loud speaker that any man caught firing any weapon would be court marshaled and dealt with severely. If any one even thought of firing a weapon. . . . And no one on our ship, to my knowledge, did fire, but all these other ships, or most of them, somebody was firing. . . . They were firing all sizes [of] guns. The rumor--and I've heard since then that they've checked it out pretty close--that several men died that night just from shrapnel and people going wild and firing them guns. I think there was something like forty-some people maybe on the beach and on these ships that were killed that night just needlessly. But that's the way I remember it when the Japanese came to surrender.

K: And how quickly after that did you get to come home?

M: Well, we were assigned then to take the troops into Japan. We took the troop ships with the Army--mostly Army and some Marines--and we escorted them into the Japanese homeland. The ones on our ships, in our convoy, went into Wakayama. There was a prisoner of war camp there at Wakayama. I can recall on the way in, it was mined and the bays and the harbor and all that was mined. So as we were going in to Wakayama, we had to be very careful not to hit a mine. We had some mine sweepers with us, but on our ship, we used the 20mm guns and exploded several mines on the way in there. Other ships were doing the same thing. I can't recall of any ship getting hit with a mine.

K: Were those Japanese prisoners of war there or American prisoners of war?

M: [They were] American prisoners of war in a Japanese camp.

K: Did you see any of them?

M: No, I didn't see any of them. They were taken out of there actually before the troops got in. I mean, they went in, took them out, and got them back to hospitals in the Philippines or Guam or someplace and got them ready to come back.

The men that were prisoners of the Japanese were treated very, very bad, a lot worse than most of the ones that were treated by the Germans.

K: So, you did hear stories?

M: Oh, yes. We've heard stories. I do know a couple of people that were prisoners of the Japanese. I think, in my job now, I've dealt with several prisoners of war. There are very few prisoners of war that were prisoners of the Japanese that are living today. Most of them have died. There are still a few of the POWs that were caught by the Germans. For some reason or another, the treatment of the ones that were in Japan. . . . Not too many of them made it too far. There's a few in Columbiana County, I would say, maybe. I can recall one in Wellsville. There are maybe three at the most that I can recall. It could be more, but that's all I know. Then, there are several POW's that were prisoners of war with the Germans in Columbiana County.

K: Is there anything that sticks out in your mind about the war? Is there any story that you always tell or anything that happened to you that was unusual?

M: I don't think anything. . . .

K: You never got into trouble or anything?

M: Well, we didn't get into too much trouble. We were at sea most of the time.

K: It's kind of hard to get. . . .

M: It's hard to get into trouble at sea. I got into my share of trouble, and there was trouble. It seems like there were bad times. . . . You remember the good times, but the bad times, you don't recall them too often.

K: When did you get out of the service?

M: Well, the war was over in Japan, in August of 1945, and I was on a four-year enlistment. I went in when I was 17, so I was supposed to get out the day before I became 21, which at that time in the Navy was called the Kiddy Car Cruise. The reason they called it the Kiddy Car Cruise was because you were in and out before you were 21, so you were just a kid. My birthday was in May. I would be 21 on May 29, 1946. At the time, there was a railroad strike, so I was off the ship and I was in a receiving station in Brooklyn, New York. The strike broke around the first part of June, so they put us on trains going to Great Lakes, Illinois to different places where we were going to be discharged. I got to Great Lakes on June 3 and was discharged on June 4, 1946. That's when I got out. I got out of the service and went back and finished high school. Then, I went to college for one semester, and then I quit down there.

I was out of the Navy for about three and a half years. I went back into the Navy, and that time I enlisted for four years. I retired in 1964. In 1964, I got out, came home, and I worked at Bliss for 12 years. For the last 12 years, I've been working for the County Veterans Service Commission.

K: You were young when you were in. What do you think is different about the attitude that you had as opposed to the attitude that we saw in the soldiers of my generation during the Vietnam War?

M: I don't know. I think that any war that this country has been connected with. . . . The younger person who goes into the service at a time like this. . . . I think, if you're that young, you don't know any better. Normally, you're not married and there's no family. You're on your own, and if somebody tells you to do something--especially my generation when you just come out of high school--you don't ask, "Why?" I'm not saying that's bad or good, but times have changed. This country has never been the same since World War II. I think there's been more Americans in World War II, than in all of the. . . . I mean, I think the generation of today, you're . . . all of the trouble.

K: Yeah. We've heard about someone who was a war (Vietnam) officer. I don't think that would have happened during World War II, regardless of how hated it was.

M: It might happen now and then in World War II, but I don't really know how often. I'm not saying that it did happen. But I think the main difference between the wars. . . . A lot of the young fellows. . . . Not

everybody was getting on. I know a kid that was killed in Vietnam, and he volunteered. He didn't know any better. Some people think there's a certain amount of adventure. I know people that have served two or three hitches in Vietnam. When they had to go back, they did go back.

I think one main difference is, in Vietnam, you went over. . . . I don't know if I've got this right, but I think when your year was up, you went back to the states. You came back. In World War II a few years earlier, you knew that you weren't coming back until the war was over. So, if you went to Vietnam and could come back to the states after one year. . . . I don't care how, by not doing your job when you were supposed to or hiding in the bushes--I'm not saying that anyone that I knew did this--I think it happened. I think I might have done it myself if I knew that I could stay alive, then come back.

Another thing with Vietnam, you could stay out of the service with Vietnam. If you went to learn a trade, if you had enough money to go to college. . . . Certainly, if you made up a story to get out of going overseas, there were a lot of ways to get out of it. We didn't have this opportunity in World War II. And actually, we didn't have it during the Korean War. I think they trained certain fractions of the society. They played on the gentlemen that should have been there but weren't there; they got out of it by going to school. They got out of it because their family maybe had a little bit more money and they could get out of going over there and roll around in the mud, like Jane Fonda.

K: Did you see that happen? Did you see as many of our boys enlisting in Vietnam--when you went to school--after World War II? We figured out that there wasn't a family enlisted in World War II. Nobody in World War II had a son or a grandson. . . .

M: When I got out of the service in September of 1964, Vietnam started in August of 1964. So, 30 days after Vietnam started, I was out. I completed my time and had retired from the Navy. My son was probably in fifth grade. I don't recall somebody saying, "Joe Smith is trying to beat the draft." I feel certain that there was a few who maybe did that. You know, I can't recall.

K: But was the big percentage of problems in the Army or the Navy, or any of the rest of the branches during World War II?

- M: No. They just took so many, and that was it. In World War II, everybody. . . . The state wasn't defenseless, but other people, if they were older than normal. . . .
- K: Did it bother you knowing that the women were in the factories making those ships and planes?
- M: No, not really, because I knew that it had to be done. If it wasn't for them, it wouldn't have been done as fast. They needed the people. The ship yards and the factories worked around the clock, seven days a week. I think that's one of the starts for women getting into the workplace. You know, the opportunity was there, and they were needed. I think when they got into the workplace, when they got some freedom that they didn't have before. . . .
- K: It had to get done by somebody.
- M: Getting back to the other situation. With Vietnam, finally they made it harder to beat the draft. Basically, just going to college wasn't enough if your number came up. Then, towards the end, they would only allow so many. You would know ahead of time if you had to go, or you would know from the beginning of the year, the day you were going and about what time you were going to go. I think that was when Vietnam was winding down. If they would have done that at the beginning, I think it would have been better, a lot better.
- K: In working with the Veterans affairs, do you know how many veterans are in this town?
- M: Quite a few. I don't know exactly how many we had. We have approximately 15,000 veterans in Columbiana County, but that's of all the wars.
- K: You deal with veterans' problems, right?
- M: Right.
- K: Medical problems?
- M: Yes, I try to help them get help. We don't help them that much. We can send them to the proper place, to the Veterans Administration, so that they can be on their road to getting help.
- K: One of the things that I have heard often is that the Vietnam Veteran came home in so much worse shape than the veterans from World War II. We hear that they have had it so much worse and that they're coming home, and they're in worse shape mentally and emotionally, and that they were exposed to Agent Orange and all those



kinds of things. Do you think, in all honestly--you were in the service for a long period of time--that these kids that served in Vietnam actually had it any worse, or were they just more of a complaining generation because the war wasn't popular? A lot of men came home from World War II with scars that never healed, didn't they?

M: Definitely, a lot came home from all wars with scars that never healed and never will heal. I think that one of the differences--maybe not the main difference--of the ones that were in Vietnam. . . . In all wars, you have to remember that not everyone was in combat, whether it be World War II, Vietnam, whatever. Probably more percentage-wise . . . in civil war, more were in combat than any war that we were ever in. One of the things that happened there--as I said before--if you went over there for your year, if you could make it for a year, you were coming home. In most cases with the Vietnam Veteran, when his year was up, he flew back to the States. He might have been in the battlefield on Monday, and on Thursday he's back in the states. He had no time to adjust. There was no time from the time that he left the battlefield until the time that he was back in society. When he got back here, people didn't treat him right; they looked down on him. Not everyone, but it don't take many people to do things like what was done to them. You figure that everybody is against you. That's one of the main differences.

In World War II, most came back aboard ship or you laid around overseas. By the time you got back, it might be three or four months before you got home. The ones that were here when the war was over, there was parades, celebrations. You were a hero, whether you were in combat or whether you were driving an ambulance in London. And this made a difference. A lot of times, your unit would come back, or your ship would come back. These Vietnam Veterans come back one at a time. And I think this had a psychological difference with these people.

Agent Orange, I don't really know. I've filed several claims for Agent Orange, and I don't know of any yet that have been approved. The VA [Veterans Administration], however, are going back and reconsidering all these claims on Agent Orange. The only thing that the VA has recognized so far from Agent Orange is acne. It's a skin disease. There have been cases where people say--and I haven't seen statistics--that more cancer is in this age group. Comparing the ones that went over and the ones that weren't over. . . . You have to remember once again that not everyone that went to Vietnam was exposed to Agent Orange. So, you have to break this down. There were a lot of people that

handled Agent Orange; the air crews that dropped it and so forth. I personally think that Agent Orange is a factor in this. I think it should be reconsidered. [They should] and go back and look at the things that have happened. There's been records that had children born with spinabifida and different types of diseases such as this. Whether it's a factor or not, I don't know. I can't say. The Vietnam Veterans think that they're dragging their feet, that this should be settled a lot faster.

K: Do you have any veterans from World War II that you know of that were exposed to any kinds of things like that? Probably, some of them would have been exposed to radiation.

M: Radiation, in fact, I had a fellow in today. His brother was in Iwo Jima right after the war. He's had skin cancer, and he's got cancer of the liver right now. Now the VA is saying if you didn't break out with something like this within 40 years--it's been past 40 years. There was the atom bomb test at Eniwetok, and different tests. There's been some of those people that have had different types of cancer. It's very possible that this is what has caused it, very possible.

K: But, they don't seem to be making the claim. . . .

M: Well, they didn't even recognize any claims until just recently, see. Now, a lot of them are gone. They are no longer with us. The ones that are making the claims now, they are past the 40-year deadline. So, I don't know what's going to happen, whether they're going to recognize it or not. But, they're filing some [claims] now, from World War II, from Hiroshima [and] Nagasaki. Some of the troops did go in there right after the bomb was dropped in there. There's different stipulations: you had to be there; you had to be so close; you had to be there so long. It makes it tough to file a claim. That doesn't mean that you're going to get anything.

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K: You're still in the battlefield, aren't you?

M: Yeah, that's right. I'm thinking about retiring again.  
[Laughter]

K: Okay, well thank you.

M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW