

TRANSCRIPT

ORAL INTERVIEW WITH

LAWRENCE WESTERMAN

18 FEBRUARY, 1995

JP James Pritzker, Lawrence Westerman, 18 February 1995, Long Beach California. You mentioned on the way over here, ah, that your father was from Germany.

LW Yeah.

JP That he, that he was serving, was serving in the German Army in Africa. Where was he from in Germany?

LW Oh, Bringer, Bringer...a small town which was (see gesacht, say gesacht) if you know what (say gesacht) means. I don't know what it means say gesacht...it means.

JP I see.

LW it means....means, something...say gesacht.

JP Ah ha.

LW He was born in 1860.

JP Was his name Westerman then?

LW His name was Westerman then. His name was (Kersten).

JP (Krystol)...Westerman. And his wife was also from Bringer?

LW No, his wife was from East Prussia, East Prussia. Lt's see, ah...I don't know where it is. It's my mother's sister. And she died. That is my mother's sister, the first husband, the first wife of my father died. That's how my mother go into the picture. He sent for my mother.

JP Yeah.

LW After the baby was born. My first oldest brother is my half brother.

JP Is this the one that's the bookkeeper?

LW Yeah, that's the bookkeeper.

JP Okay, and, where...you mentioned that your father was a, uh, a first Lieutenant in the German Army.

LW Yeah, ah, I don't know what his title...uh..I think he was afirst lieutenant, or...

JP Did he ever mention it?

LW No, he, he wasn't very proud of it.

JP So, where was he, was he in ah, in Africa...you mentioned that he was...

LW Well, he went to when all the big countries were trying to make it, like Great Britain, ...you know and, the French were on the Mediterranean sea there, and other countries were trying to get in and I don't know, I don't know what Germany was doing. Thank you.

JP Your welcome. Okay, so in 18..you mentioned on the way over in the car that in 1888 he deserted and, uh, and came to Annapolis Maryland.

LW Annapolis, yeah...my father's uncle Sid.

JP Did you remember the name of the did he mention it? But that was sometime in 1888.. How did he end up in Chicago?

LW Well, my Dad was a tinsmith, and he got a job with the Pennsylvania Railroad in Annapolis. And, from Annapolis, why he made some beautiful rails for the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad.... now these are some big...lengths at the end of the railroad, you know...big lengths.with a lot of doodads on it.

JP Excuse me one moment. Okay, so uh, You were discussing your father working with the Pennsylvania Railroad and he spent some time in Chicago.

LW He finally landed in Philadelphia, that's where he got married in about 1889 or 90, something like that, 1888 or 89, 90, something like that.

JP That was the second time.

LW No, that was the first time. That was the first time. And he married Tina. And then they had a baby, Arthur, that's my oldest brother. He was born in 1891, I think, something.. and then his mother died. Tina died, and then my dad sent for my mother, in Germany. And about a year later she came and they got married and they had several more children.

JP Wow. And your mother's name?

LW Mother's name....uh, Tina....what the deuce is Ma's name?

JP So that's how you knew her, as Ma?

LW I knew her as Ma, that's right, you see, all the.....gosh, I couldn't tell you. What's her name?

JP Don't worry about it.

LW It evades me, I, I'll probably find it, it'll come back to me...

JP Don't worry about it.

LW All right.

JP So, where did you go to, uh, so by this time you were living in Chicago?

LW No, In Philadelphia, they moved to Chicago in 1893, the Worlds Fair. 1893 and they had only my brother, my half brother. Ada was born in 94, that's my oldest sister and the reason why, the Worlds Fair was in Chicago, that's why he came to Chicago and he opened up a tin shop at the very center of town, Chicago Avenue and Ashland, that's where he had his tin shop.

JP Chicago Avenue and Ashland

LW And he, and he had a nice tin shop there and that lasted until 1916. The war had not, 1916, that lasted until 1916 when he fell off the roof and broke his leg and that ended the tin shop.

JP He had quite a time there.

LW In the meantime he had, I'll name them, he had me, let's see there was Ada then me, Lawrence. Then comes Marge and then comes, uh, Frieda and then comes Harold, uh, how many we got?

JP Let's see we have Ada, Lawrence, Marge, Frieda, Harold, and Arthur.

LW Oh and there's one in between that died, though, so that's the one that died in infancy.

JP So you went to school at Lane Tech, uh High School.

LW Went to school, grammar school was Wells School. W E L L S School, that was that was grammar school and then I went to Lane Tech for two years.

JP So that would have been, let's see, about 19...15....

LW 12

JP 1912 , 1914, and then you went to the business college?

LW Yeah....Baldwin Business college...learned to be a bookkeeper.

JP Were you brought up Lutheran in the United States?

LW A Lutheran. Now do I have to tell you about my experience in religion? .I can tell you.

JP And did you speak German at home?

LW Oh yes, I spoke German at home...uh, when you're 14 years of age, when you go to catechism to be confirmed at Easter. All right, this is, this would been about 1913 and 14. In this catechism, this is done by German Schoolmasters, Big Michael, I'll never forget it. Two feet higher than I was, so at 14 or 15 I think a little. I said Master, Adam and Eve were the first two people on earth. "Richtig mein Junge, sehr richtig." And they had two sons, Cain and Abel. "Ganz richtig," uh, that's right, uh, this guy had a two inch, ruler about two feel long. Cain slew Abel, richtig, went into another land and got himself a wife, right? Where did he get the wife? Right? "Dumkopf!" Why he would hit me across the shoulders with that, that's the knock that knocked religion out of my head, I just, from that time on I don't believe, I'm sorry but I just don't believe. Here's a man that could have changed my whole life by giving me a nice story, but he didn't .. He hit me with that two inch ruler... and then from that time, oh, let's see, I had Leonard Selzerman, and I had two jew boys with me, oh we used to be a clique, there used to be about six or seven of us, and Leonard Selzerman, and, gosh, he came to California, didn't he, Louis Wyzynski. Two swell guys. Then we started making fun of the various religions, just a bunch of kids, you know, making fun of....and, no way out. That's when I thought, seeing I go to school all this time and here I am, uh, had to be 1915, 16, a bunch of us always meeting at the corner, uh saloon, I says why don't I organize this gang and get a little place for a clubhouse, which I did. 25 cents a week it cost you to be in our club and we had about 30 members. Al Amargo was the oldest one, in the, ...he had a total of about 4 years my senior, but we had a, basement in Smith's uh back yard and uh, in that we began.....a pool table, and do you remember the Victrolas with the big flowers, uh, what was., we had that...and we'd run a little dance down in this basement...no bigger than this room, but, but we played cards, we played...pinocle and various games there....mostly pinocle. Oh, Westerman had to be home at 9 o'clock every night, which I was. Now, but this particular night I decided to jump out of the window, I think it was a nice pinocle game going on and back in, out the window I went and got to the club and when I come home my dad caught me and he kicked the devil out of me, he just, uh, I still can see my mother saying don't kill him, don't kill him, don't kill him. Well, and it was that day that I joined the Army.

JP And that was?

LW In 1915...15 or 16.

JP And you were coming home late from the club?

LW From the club, from the club.

JP How did you hear about the National Guard?

LW Oh, I don't remember. All I knew was that they was soldiers. Oh, and don't forget there

was a parade all the time and, uh, the soldiers always intrigued me, and people with guns on their shoulders and things like...and then, like the machine gun company, why it was....don't forget I was a young punk kid of uh 16 or 17 years old and that intrigued me.

JP How did, uh, what did your father, uh think about this?

LW Oh, he loved it, he..he was ticked to death I joined the Army. Oh yes, that was....and in fact I made a big, big deal there with my dad..

JP Now by this time I am assuming that WWI had broken out in Europe. What was the feeling in your family about, you know, Germany and England...

LW Oh, we were Americans...oh, my dad...in the German army but he was American...this is my country. No, it was really, there was no...he belonged to the Deutsche Krieger Kameraderie, that's like our American Legions. And he was president of that thing at one time, see.

JP Even though he had deserted from the German Army?

LW It didn't make no difference. He was, oh, well, I think they were too god damned strict with him, I think that was one of the reasons...the fact that... so and he was doubly proud when I come back on crutches and he saw me and he said "Lawrence what the deuce did they do to you?" and I said "This is what the Germans did to me, pop" and he said "I know, but that's the War and don't blame the guy who shot those off" and he was right, I mean.....order, right down the old apple orchard, so from that time on my dad and I got to be very, very close. I'd take him to the Bismarck Hotel in Chicago, you know where it is, you know, on Randolph Street, and I knew the telephone operator down there and I knew the telephone operator where I could get a drink there in the Bismarck Hotel and one two three, I put that little bottle of whiskey in front of my dad and Lawrence, how do you do this? I said all you have to do is know people and he liked it and then we had dinner and oh, we did that, oh, probably about five or six times in my sojourn, when I was home.

JP So when you first enlisted what was the, what was your recruit training like?

LW Oh, I'll tell you. They didn't know very much. It was very few soldiers in those days, I mean, they didn't, the officers they didn't have training like they had at West Point or anything like that. These were usually businessmen and that's how they..oh the whole way squads right, squads left, right shoulder arms, left shoulder arms, things like that. That was real sad. It got to be sort of a club like atmosphere, but we had to put on a uniform and we had a parade every Monday night. That was, I would say that the officers, well, I can't criticize them because I wasn't around them long enough to know them, but that was the beginning of my soldering, like that. I was there every Monday night, and don't forget no cars, then, that was all done by streetcar..a nickel going and a nickel coming back, and I had, had, and we usually called, and we were there at 6 o'clock in the evening and then we quit at 9 o'clock. We went to Boot Camp one year, the first year, 1915...where was that?

Gosh, I can't remember... that was a picnic, that was an outing, but we had a parade everyday. That was the big deal.

JP How long were you in before they issued you a uniform, or did you have to buy one?

LW Oh right away. They had uh, excess clothing.

JP Did you keep your rifle at the armory..or take did you it home?

LW No, at the armory

JP And were you paid in those days?

LW No.

JP So, no pay for drill?

LW No, sir, no pay for drill. In fact I think it costs us 25 cents just to be there. It cost us 25 cents. I don't know, because, don't forget, we were gonna go to camp and then that 25 cents was forwarded so that we could have a popsicle or things like that

JP Now when you went to your summer camp, did they provide you with rations?

LW Oh yes.

JP You didn't pay for the...

LW No, and stoves. Each company had their own...their own stove, you know....each company. So you can figure on about 14, 15 little...well they were little stoves you know.

JP The rolling kitchens?

LW Oh, oh, they were rolling kitchens all right, but I don't know, they were nothing like the ones they have today, beautiful ones, but now of course being at camp we had three men in the kitchen, gosh, they were, they were cooks, they were, in fact their profession was cooking on the outside they were probably cooking for someone, cooking in some restaurant or like that. Oh, that's on the whole, on the whole, but I would say they could cook up a pretty good meal.

JP So you ate well at annual training?

LW I always enjoyed it. I had little Dinky Donovan at, well, he is a very personal friend of mine...6 inches shorter than I was and loved to drink alcohol, and he could drink and I was so tickled to death that I didn't like alcohol. And smoking the same way. Oh, and during that time when we were in Texas there used to be a bill board on the on the roads. They

had a big cow on there and his testicles hung down below his belly you know, and they wanted you to give a verse about that and I came up with this one: You're tongue won't be bit by a bit of Prince Albert. And that got me 144 cans of Prince Albert tobacco. For my company oh, about every two months after that we got a.....made your own cigarettes.

JP So the, uh, first rifle that you were given was it a Springfield or was it a Cragg?

LW Oh, it was a Springfield, 1904. Spanish American war. That five, five shells in it.

JP And how long were you in before they gave you marksmanship training?

LW Well, let me see, I was down in that basement oh, about I got my first training probably about a month or two months after I joined the Army, after I joined the Illinois National Guard. Oh what kind of training is that....Ithe officers didn't do it either. Most of those officers were businessmen...

JP And what was your first assignment when you got, once you finished recruit training?

LW Oh, well, uh...the first time is when we went to, uh, Texas. We went to Texas. Now, don't forget that Pancho Villa was in 1916, Pancho Villa was in 1916.

JP That's correct.

LW I6 they sent us out to Texas. I went, uh We didn't know our ear from a hole in the.....don't forget pup tents They didn't have any quarters for us, not only ...not only that....in fact when the big tents came in, the tents were the size of this room and eight men slept in that on the Texas desert. Do you know what Texas desert is? It's sand and ants...big ants and small ants and uh, tarantulas, and oh what's the other animal? Oh god, well, we didn't know our ear from a hole in the ground...we were all from Chicago...you know, what the...we didn't know anything about thatthere...it was terrible...and uh, and then they were going to march us into Mexico but we never got there....

JP How long were you in Texas?

LW Oh, I'd say about, I'd say it was six months...a real vacation for me. It was during the summer months of course.

JP So this was about June through, maybe June through December of 1916?

LW No it was that, I'd say October, maybe October of that year. And,

JP Okay, uh, Now wasn't it, wasn't it about that time that the 1st Illinois Infantry became the 131st Infantry?

LW No that came when we first got into war. That was 1917. We got into war about March

of 1917 I think and we were saying that the 131st...well, we got to the what division, uh, 33rd Division, then we were assigned, same as 132nd Infantry the same way. COL Abel Davis, uh I liked him. He was a great one, he was a soldier...and Sandborne were soldiers, uh, but not the rest of them, they were not soldiers. I'm talking, reflecting way back to what they hell were they in that Army for? Well it was social thing at that time...oh, I'm glad I joined the 1st Infantry. It was very good....both for what soldiering they did and also for companionship.

JP So you came back from Mexico, uh, the Mexican Border, what about sometime late 1916?

LW 17, no 16

JP late 1916

LW When did the war broke out...when did we declare war...March 1917?

JP My recollection is 6 April 1917.

LW Well April...

JP Maybe I can look it up a little later. I believe it was, ah, here we go The United States was at war on April 6, 1917 so, uh, you were pretty close there...

LW All right now....so we were we were mustered in March 1, uh, all of us didn't show up on April 6th, let me tell you that but we, probably, what we knew as a... Uh, I would say 90 % of the people came and then what we had to do, we had to protect, uh, to produce and the roads and, uh, my little company, my two squads, I was a corporal by that time, my two squads were protecting the bridge that went into the stockyards. International Harvester....131st...and Western Avenue, yes, sir, that was the beginning of it, and we had uh two tents two tents right along the river and we and that was the entrance to the stockyard, so we had to protect that bridge. Well, now, I'm not, who was I trying to fool? I don't know a bridge from an elbow, it's like, being honest about it....so we put a man guarding here and a man guarding there and a man guarding there, what were our instructions? Are we supposed to hold up a railroad, to find out if the Germans were on it? We didn't know, really, it was real sad...International Harvester was very very nice to us, gave us a lot of little nice things, things that....and then we had to go to a lunch counter about a half a mile away...that how we got our rations.

JP So, at what point did your unit leave Illinois?

LW Oh, we left July the 2nd or 3rd and we landed in Rockford on July the 4th, 1917. That was, it was Camp Grant, it was Camp Grant but there wasn't any, we literally chased the farmers off their land. There was dogs, cats, horses, uh, cattle I think, also pigs and things like that. I climbed onto a horse right away, and I got knocked off that horse at night time by a high wire and we were riding across and it hit me right underneath it and knocked

me off, lucky thing, I could have severed my head on that horse but I was okay fortunately. Nothing ..prancing around on that horse in the dark...

JP So how long were you at Camp Grant?

LW Oh, July...oh, by August oh. I think the first soldiers came in at around, oh when I say soldiers, I say the first people, the men, came around I think September, and that's when we left for France, I am sorry, to Texas.

JP So you went back to Texas?

LW We went back to Texas.

JP In September of 1917. And what, where where did they sent you to Texas? Where did they send you in Texas?

LW What town was that? No. Austin, no. Where is...We were not allowed to go into the hotel, that's all I know, in the next town... soldiers were forbidden to go into that town, the hotel.

JP So how long were you in Texas the second time in 1917?

LW Let me see, until, I think the spring of 1918...

JP Yeah, because uh, my recollection is that you got on the troop ship in late May of 19...

LW You know what the troop ship was? It was a German ship.

JP Really?

LW Yes, that was a German ship...It was about 11,000 of us on that, including one contingent of nurses, 100 nurses.

JP Now when were you commissioned?

LW I think it was in 1917...oh, I, the day, I can't tell you.

JP I mean, was it like before Christmas?

LW Oh yeah, before Christmas.

JP So you went from private to corporal to sergeant to second lieutenant almost entirely in 1917?

LW Almost.

JP And did you stay in the same company?

LW Same company.

JP Now were there many soldiers in M Company of the 131st that had known you as a private?

LW Oh yes.

JP That were still privates? How, how was that, being an officer?

LW Well, I'll blow my horn a little, I was a valuable.....I liked my men, uh,we had, as a first sergeant we had,what the deuce was his name?

JP You mentioned Captain Stockwell had been a first sergeant in that same company.

LW Oh yes, he got to be a captain, he got to be a captain.....but the first sergeant in our company was busted because of the fact that he got drunkit was a big do, about the swellest guy if there ever was one. I mean, he taught me more about soldiering than any of them. He knew his onions. But, he, he was, gosh what was his name? And he got to be the first sergeant again, I mean, what the deuce, that was his job, but they had to discipline him sometime I guess, he used to get so drunk, to terribly drunk. He was in the, I think he was in the 1904 Boxer Rebellion in China.

JP No kidding.

LW Yeah

JP So, well, that's one to look up. So you got, so you had very little problem being an officer in the same company that you, where you had been a private?

LW Oh no, no problem. I got to be the calisthenics man in my regiment. I had....he'd come in top of the pedestal way up there high, doing one two one two every morning. This is how I got in wrong with the officers. They was standing around on both sides while these guys were exercising, doing with their ups and down so I went to Coloneland I said Colonel, is there any reason why we officers shouldn't take these exercises. Well, aren't they?? One two three they all had to take their exercises in the morning....some of these guys that was that regular army in those days I'll tell you, but I think it did a lot of good to do a little exercising in the morning. Well I used to do it 25 feet up, one two one two, used to do it for the whole regiment.

JP So the entire regiment would assemble and by this time, you are at full war strength 250 man companies?

LW Something like that...I think....3,000 men.

- JP 3,000 men all doing calisthenics at the same time and uh, what sort of practical training did you have, did you train by companies?
- LW No, by squads....it was two squads at a time.
- JP Did you have French, British instructors when you were in Texas?
- LW Squads right, squads left...that's all. You had no foreign instructors.. Now, now comes the bad part. Who are we gonna send to school to learn about thegun, who they want, but the British didn't really have a quick firing gun. They didn't have one. The French also didn't..
- JP The automatic rifle.
- LW The automatic rifle, and then the beginning of the machine gun. We had a machine gun, we used to do it this way.
- JP Crank.
- LW Crank..right.. And being mechanically inclined well I got along very very well with it. I could dismantle the machine gun and put it together again. So there was several of us in, in the 131st infantry that could do this and not only would we spell each other, taking turns at this end of the guns...and things like that, oh that was....in fact I was at school at the time that they decided to send us to Europe and then we had to go on to training.....(end of side one)
- JP Uh you mentioned, uh, worrying about the shosho automatic rifle and I believed where we left off was...going to, we were discussing going to Chicago.
- LW It was a bad things to do, well, there were quite a number of us and when I say quite a number, I don't know how many said they wanted to see their folks in Chicago and I think they finally caught up with the crowd in Hoboken New Jersey which was the German vessel Kaiser Wilhelm the first was boarded. So, now we gonna board the German ship with all the gear and each officer had one of those big trunks and what the hell do you do with a trunk when you are going to war? You see how green we were? We were absolutely green. Well I was one of the favored ones. To the day I go from the shore to the ship and Sergeant Keabal and I are discussing, we have a trunk and we are discussing how we can do this a little quicker..and something like that. Well the ship goes in and out from the wharf, one time it got just a little too...and down went Keabal and trunk and Westerman in the water, the gangplank and everything I'm talking about went down there. And it hit me on the leg and bruised my left leg a little, not very much. But it did wound me. Keabal couldn't swim so I held the, the board on what we'd been walking on in between and I hoisted cable up there and then we went to the hospital and I didn't have to do a god damn thing on that ship going across because I was in the hospital.

JP Was it your trunk?

LW No, it wasn't my trunk. No, no it wasn't. My trunk. I never saw my trunk. We were absolutely green. You have no idea...

JP So you were, by this time you were a platoon leader in M Company. Do you remember which platoon you had?

LW Oh, I haven't the slightest. Oh I imagine it was the peewee squad. Oh, I, I got along with my men very well.

JP Was you, was your sergeant about your, was your platoon sergeant about your age? Younger? Older?

LW I would say he was older.

JP Was he someone you had known?

LW No, never knew him before. Keabal K E A B A L, Sgt. Keabal, Loved him. In affliction. We didn't know our ear from a hole in the ground. I'll tell you pal right now I don't know what they say about when you are a soldier and you have a gun on your shoulder and you are gonna shoot the Germans and what the hell, that was a lot of malarkey. And, I mean, we didn't know. But I'll tell you I think with General Pershing...see, and I read a little about General...see, immediately, immediately they wanted to infuse the American soldiers into their...England wanted and France wanted us, they wanted us to be infused, but Pershing said no and I'm glad of that because we learned, we Americans learn pretty fast.

JP Did you get any special officer training when you were commissioned?

LW No there was not a bit.

JP So one day they just said Sergeant Westerman you are now Lieutenant Westerman?

LW You are a second lieutenant, right. And the only, the only thing is because you were a little forward.....you can sense some of these things, you know.

JP You had a high school education, which was unusual in those days.

LW Yeah, that was a big deal. And, and then now going to this mathematics course, I learned quite a lot. Especially the one in the Army, I'll mention .the one in Oklahoma....what the hell was the name of that one. There people probably about three or four years older than I am. They had a little more sense than Westerman, and Westerman kept his mouth shut and he was trying to absorb a lot of this, and I did. I learned a lot.

JP So you are on the troop ship Kaiser Wilhelm.

LW Yes. And I, I don't have to do a thing cause I am a wounded soldier.

JP So you landed Where, in St. Misere?

LW No, Not St. Misere , up, up further north. Crossing the English channel.

JP You were in Brest?

LW Brest, that's it.

JP Maps come in handy. So you got on the...

LW And immediately.....going, getting off the ship we immediately went into the barracks that the French used in 1807, dirty and lots of ants and oh, it was filthy. Those were the barracks that they used, that was the first barracks but we moved out of them the next day, but....and then from there we went to.....

JP Well, lets see. What I should have gotten is a....let's see if we can stop the machine for a moment here.

LW The trench were just a ditch, that's all it is, just a ditch...you didn't have places to sleep you slept right there. You don't have time to make a bed or anything like that. You had to sleep right there to get to sleep.

JP Basically you stayed, ah on the 8th of August, just prior to the 8th so between May of 1918 and August of 1918 you moved from Brest to Albert and then they moved you east toward the front.

LW Toward the front. But you see that's as far as I got. That's why I say, What the hell kind of war is it when you only get to fight two days and then you get shot up and then you don't have to do any more. Is that Breve?

JP Yes, that's Bray, just north of the Somme.

LW I would say, we were stationed a little north of Bray where we were in action...

JP So you had to march from the railhead at Bray...

LW You asked me if I went back and I did, I went back to the farmhouse where I was quartered and it was very very nice and the lady that greeted me there was the daughter of the grandmother that I had there and oh gosh they couldn't do enough for me.

JP So that was about 15 years ago.

LW Yes sir.

- JP That would have been 1980. Did you have much contact with the British?
- LW Oh yes. July the 4th, July the 4th we had to put on a party for the British. Well. And I. On that July 4th, we captured about 30 Germans, but that was our 4th of July party for the British, that was why we did that.
- JP So you were already in the trench line on 4 July and you were doing patrolling already..
- LW Right. I think the Germans didn't have enough personnel to dig that far....you see most of their flank was on the Western front with the at that time. They was probably with Italy I should hope. Oh, I had to tell you about a little incident in Albert, uh, we got into this restaurant and there was two guys and my wife and I drove them nuts, Frenchmen.... and when I told them I was here in way back in oh, 1918 why they put their....up....well, we could have had the restaurant....they didn't want us to leave but we were on a train going back to Paris.
- JP So. One question that I must ask you is when you were in the British sector did they issue you a rum ration. ?
- LW No, no they did not.
- JP Did , were you issued any other British equipment?
- LW No, no. See I am only in there now with the British for two days and, when I get hit, but during that time, during that time why I met quite a number of Englishmen there and, and they were so happy to see the Americans come in doing that. Now, in fact, I don't know...I think the French were just like the Americans at the beginning, they didn't know, they had no knowledge of what to do, how to do it or when to do it. That was the sad part of that and that's what I think what you are doing now is gettingI don't think we are ever going to have another big war, personally, in my judgement. I don't think so, I hope not. Why I say that is in retrospect it the Germans knocked the devil out of France in 1870 alright, then we had a big influx from Germany into this country. Big influx, see, so, and a lot of them were a mechanics like my dad. My dad was in the mechanics section of it, and a lot of people lived in Chicago. It was actually called, it was German all the way. Even quite a number of the Jewish emigrants from Germany came over, cause how did they build those nice churches otherwise, I don't know, just can't understand why....so now Germany tries to kick the crap out of us...how the hell can the....and then Japan tried, and uh....they had no chance this is why I don't think we're gonna have any more big wars. The war will be one bomb somewhere, that's all, going to be.
- JP So, when you were back at the house you mentioned you were going on a patrol at midnight on the 8th of August 1918 what is it you were told prior to that about what your units mission would be?
- LW My mission was to find out if there was any barbed wired that we were going to get

tangled up in and there wasn't so far that we saw, because we were beginning to go beyond the German lines already.

JP So you were already moving beyond the old trench lines.

LW Right. This is where I met a German Lieutenant and he had a gun in his hand and I said "Was machts du hier? And he looked at me "Sie kann Deutsche sprechen." "Ein bisschen" and I told him, just a bit but put your gun down and he put it down. Now, there were only four of us, what the hell were we going to do with a prisoner, what the hell.. So, we sent him back, back of us....and I think... took him probably a couple of hundred yards and left him go and I think that's where he went and we were not going to stop, I wasn't going to stop just for one prisoner, but I think he was an officer, too. But I, at least he, I'm sorry I didn't pick up his gun though.

JP Was it a pistol?

LW Well, it looked like a pretty good gun...black...iron black and.....

JP It was probably a Luger pistol.

LW Probably.

JP So your mission was to do a reconnaissance...for the company?

LW For the company.

JP And then you got hit. With the artillery fragment that we have before us here. And how were you evacuated from where you were hit back to the aid station?

LW They put me in a German dugout. See we were past the initial line of the Germans, so they put me in the German.... That's where I got that big cape, that great cape that the German officers wear, they put that....over me That's where I got that. Yeah.

JP So you were wounded on the 8th of August about midnight 1918, kept in a German dugout for a few hours..and what do you remember from there.

LW There was an Australian...auxiliary medical group and the doctor in Australian medical group when he looked at me the first time said "Well, sir, I think we're going to have to take the leg off." And I said "I want my leg. I want my leg or I don't want my life. You make up your mind." He said "We'll make up our mind" and I got a good leg now....I can imagine him seeing that leg the first time why I don't see how I 'd save it, but that was that. And then I think I stayed one day and they sent me on to France, uh, on to England across the channel. And I still had that German overcoat, that was warm for me, I mean, that was....and when I went to get on the boat and these Englishmen seen this German coat, said, here, here's a Jerry and down the chute I went and down into the basement of the

boat. Now, then the people were all looking for Lieutenant Westerman, they had no Westerman and pretty soon they find me down there and then they brought me up and gave me a scotch and soda. Terrible. Scotch and Soda.

JP Of course, I guess this was I guess before the Volsted Act passed...

LW Well, God. In that....well, then we landed on the Thames River someplace and we got to a hospital right outside of London and I stayed there until Christmas.

JP Was it mostly British casualties?

LW Yeah. There was four American casualties with me, that's all.

JP Did you have any contact with, uh with your unit?

LW After that, no..

JP No one knew where, did anyone know where you were?

LW Nobody knew where I was.

JP Were you getting paid regularly?

LW Oh, yeah, talking about pay, I was.....now, that was in August, and I got my pay in September and October and November. I got three paychecks and these three Irishmen were from the National Guard in New York City and they said let's take Westy with us. I was on crutches now so we go somewhere and when we get to London, I said, wait a minute, the first thing we have to think about is where are we gonna sleep tonight so we went to a.. In Piccadilly circus, they did not rent out the two top floors in the hotel....and we went there and the guy says.....those are what we want, the war's over, come on rent us some rooms. So we had a place to sleep that night, and then, when we got downstairs there was a hansom cab, horse drawn with a guy with a big stovepipe he had on up there and we got a hold of him and these three Irishmen were from New York City and they were with the New York National Guard, so they began to drink and I didn't like alcohol, not that much, anyhow.....and they got drunker than hell....and they got the cab driver drunk, and I was on the inside and they were in the upper deck and I was on the inside with this drunken driver and these guys were driving up and down the whole saying Armistice Day. The Queen now was gonna come down the way so they chased us off. So that was a happy day. With my money. Oh well. The hotel bill was very nominal, I'm talking about 3 to 4 dollars a day. That's all we had was one bedroom, but we made one bedroom take care of us, that was the best....

JP So there you were on Armistice Day, London, 1918 on crutches...and were you in an American uniform?

LW Yeah.

JP And you still had, other than getting a paycheck you still had had no contact...

LW I never had contact...with my, soldiers, never.

JP The 131st.

LW And I think my company was transferred to the eastern part of France after we got through with the British. I don't know this but I think my General, was in, General Pershing didn't like my general.

JP Who, General Bell?

LW General Bell, he was commander. He was successful....

JP I remember reading that apparently General Hill of the 65th Brigade was relieved of command of the brigade and was later killed in action with another unit, as a battalion commander.

LW Oh? Could have been.

JP But, uh, so at what point. So they shipped you home on the troop ship from England? In December of 1918?

LW Oh, I think it was a troop ship. It took us about 10 days to come across. Well, London to New York, and I was only one day in New York when I wasto Chicago. I was fortunate.

JP And that's where you were for most of 1919, or as we discussed earlier, you recall being out of the hospital at Ft. Sheridan by the time the world series of 1919 rolled around.

LW Right.

JP So how was your, how would you compare your stay at Ft. Sheridan hospital with that of the British.

LW Well, it was a new hospital, it was a small hospital and you got good service from the point of view that there were just so many doctors and so many nurses, I don't think that we had, I don't think we had a hundred patients there. It was a small hospital. Rather confined.

JP At that point did you have any contact with the regiment?

LW When the regiment came home that was what in the spring of 1920.

JP So when were you formally, were you formally discharged from the hospital and the army at the same time?

LW Same time.

JP Did you give any thought about continuing or were you not able to?

LW No, that came later. Uh, no, no, when I am still hobbling around on my crutches in 1920, uh, I'm trying to find out what I should do, so I thought I'd be a lawyer. So I went to Mayo College of Commerce, and Mayo was the teacher and the principle and everything. He had about 50 students and I learned a lot about law, but I never did like the law profession and that Leopold Loeb case came up and I got to be the prosecuting attorney in my class.

JP Oh, for moot court?

LW Yeah....But when he....when the papers came out that they were they weren't acquitted but they were not going to get hung anyhow, then I quit the law profession. I got mad. I got mad at the law profession.. So, I said, I'm glad those two kids didn't get killed, that we didn't kill them, but this one boy made out a pretty good boy in jail, he was a pretty good scientist..

JP Who, Leopold?

LW Yeah, but the other one, he was, he was nasty. He died in prison.

JP So you never, after, after you got out of the hospital, did you ever have any continued contact with the Regiment in Chicago?

LW Oh, yes, yes, I. We started the 131st Infantry Legion. And I went to Minneapolis/St Paul, and I think it was that year that we started the American Legion, and 1920, 21, something like that and I was part of that. We started the American Legion and I had charge of the affair the second year that the American Legion, the 131st Infantry Legion post and I was in charge of the entertainment. I am sorry to say that it was the worst entertainment I have ever seen in my life. Well, I didn't have much, much to say about who was going to be on this entertainment and we had a terrible... and what they did..... Beer. We got the beer for free from the gangsters. They gave us the beer for free, very little whiskey but there was whiskey to be had too, but I don't know who provided the whiskey. But we made about \$2,000, \$3,000 dollars from that deal. But I've never seen anything like it and I am never going to another one like it in my life.

JP Now this was in the armory in Chicago?

LW In the armory in Chicago.

JP Madison Street?

LW No, 16th Street and Michigan Avel... right by the railroad tracks....16th and Michigan.

JP At this point you'd given, this is the mid 1920's you'd given no thought to ever rejoining the regiment?

LW Oh no.

JP Was that because of your wounds?

LW Yes, that's partly. Then I was in school for the next three years.

JP So at that point, you, that pretty much ended your affiliation with the regiment?

LW Well I kept my affiliations all the time. I mean, I paid my dues. And when they changed from Michigan Avenue to, what was it, Cicero, or Crawford? Where'd they meet? On Kedzie, on Kedzie Avenue, did they? Sure, I went to a couple of their meeting then. But you see, those people that enlisted in the 33rd Division, some of them were in Park Villa, the next one was in South Chicago, the next one was in Joliet and the next....oh, so, I think the last one died last December of the 131st Infantry. And that Legion Post, I think the Legion Post is disbanded now.

JP I think so too, well, I'm not sure, I think there still is a Chapilly Ridge Post but I don't think there are any World War I veterans left.

LW Well, I think I'm the only one left.

JP I believe so. Now there is, and again, I'm surprised that other Illinois National Guard organizations haven't contacted you prior to this.

(End of side two