

Harry N. Vonglis Interview, NYS Military Museum

Harry N. Vonglis
Veteran

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Interviewers

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Rochester Armory
Rochester, New York

Q: Mr. Vonglis, tell me when and where you were born?

HV: Rochester NY.

Q: And what year?

HV: 1920 September

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family.

HV: Well my father is a World War One vet, came over from Greece. Inducted into service in World War One, got out as an ice-cream parlor, a place called the Sugar Bowl down in what, known as the 10th [unclear] . . . I worked in there all throughout high school, for high school, made all our candy, ice-cream, my dad finally retired from there but I went to Sacred Heart grade school and then I went two years to Aquinas Institute, and then three years to and graduated from John Marshall High School in 1939.

Q: Any brothers and sisters?

HV: Oh yes, I have three brothers and two sisters all younger than me.

Q: Now, 1940 you entered the United States Army?

HV: Yes sir.

Q: Why?

HV: I just can't, I don't know I just wanted to join the service. I just, nothing really special just that I'd always had a like do I do anything I had to do with the Army. Decided to enlist, I enlisted 1940 in Rochester in October and I went to Fort Niagara New York.

Q: You didn't enlist with any of the National Guard units [unclear] cold up?

HV: No.

Q: Just straight enlistment?

HV: Straight enlistment. I went to Fort Niagara, New York and I was assigned to Headquarters Company the 28th Infantry, which was part of that time part of the First Division. In December pardon me, forty the regiment moved to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, became part of the 8th Infantry Division which was just being organized . . . Changed the Army from four infantry regiments to three infantry regiments.

Q: What were your experiences at Fort Jackson?

HV: Mostly training, we got to go to town once in a while to meet the people, but we had good training, we had some good officers to train us because they were bringing guys from all over different outfits. New enlistees and forming the outfit almost from scratch, scratch but we had a lot of good training, a lot of good officers and good NCOs that trained us.

Q: Get a lot of ribbing about being a New Yorker?

HV: Oh yes, yes fact that in Columbia, South Carolina which is the city right there, many of the places had signs, no dogs or Yankees allowed.

Q: No dogs or Yankees allowed?

HV: No dogs or Yankees allowed, but after the big peacetime went over, the Carolina maneuvers, the regiment was adopted by Winnsboro, South Carolina. Adopted their regiment because of the way that the fellows acted bowing around the town, maneuvers we did little things like . . . weekends we used to go out and help the farmers bring in their hay, stuff like that. And the people really appreciated, out of the us the biggest share of us were all city boys. I guess this was quite an experience to get out on the farm.

Q: Could it mean any free cigarettes for you?

HV: We, we first allowed them to the civilians. We get our cigarette rations, we get our cigarettes at the commissary. Little PX we used to have, and we would split it up with the people on the post, like myself I didn't smoke and I'd get my rash. I'd take it, give it out to different men I knew.

Q: Was life very different in the old Army 1940s than it was later on?

HV: Oh yes.

Q: How so?

HV: A lot, what I want to say, closer relationships between individuals and between the officers. And there was nothing for [unclear] . . . in the barracks and had to breeze back

and forth with the enlisted men and a lot of times we get him in the card, gave me one. That was most of the younger officers, second times our first [unclear] . . . but there was a real close relationship between the officers and the enlisted men at that time.

Q: We have a lot of equipment problems back in 1940s?

HV: No we didn't have any equipment problems. We had, we didn't have many different types of weapons, when I first went in the new one then was the M1. There was noise up until then they'd all been having the O3, which still were around the O3 were still around. Sharpshooters [unclear] were got the O3, the rest of us we carried the M1.

Q: Now let's move ahead a bit, where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

HV: When Pearl Harbor was bombed I was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Q: Do you remember what you were doing, or how you heard about it?

HV: Yeah I had a date. I was in town, all of a sudden the MPs come down the street and anybody that looked like it was in uniform or, they were told to get back to camp now not any later. There was a bunch of us we had been to a party that one of the churches used to hold a party for servicemen on the weekends and they would invite different young ladies and just for a companionship that's all it was. And then came right in the MPs and [unclear] back to the barracks. Went to get on the bus right I'm back.

Q: So what happened right after that?

HV: After that why we were, just everybody was jumping, running around trying to find out what we were going to do and when we were going to do it. It was a little, more or less disorganized, greedy wouldn't [unclear], war was first declared and things got settled down, and we went to, from Fort Jackson we went to Tennessee. First maneuver during wartime . . . Tennessee we were at Camp Forest, Tennessee. After the maneuvers we're stationed there that the regiment was, and we got our orders from there overseas in forty-three, early forty-three. We went to Northern Ireland and we stayed in Northern Ireland until the invasion. The regiment we landed [unclear] . . . 11th of June we hit the beaches. While we were in Ireland we were, we were treated like kings. People really appreciated us, they went out of their way to hold dances and to hold get togethers and hold movies and everything else in the little town, and it was close to our barracks. Went out of their way, compared to what happened to other soldiers that were stationed in other parts of Ireland . . . of course like I said again we did a lot of things for the people like we get our cigarette rations and we dropped the cigarettes in front of someone you know. Little things like that you know to show that we weren't given, we appreciate what they did for us what they did for us they made it really nice. In fact they had a plaque made that said that 28th Infantry was [unclear] . . . gave a little plaque to each one of us that said [unclear] . . .

Q: Let's get up to Normandy, D [unclear] . . . what was it like?

HV: Lot of confusion, lots of confusion. We, the landing was in early hours of the morning when we hit the beach. We come from a ship from Northern Ireland, all the way [unclear]. When we went in it was just about breaking daylight when we hit the beaches. We went in and we, we connected up with the Screaming Eagles, 101st Airborne.

Q: Way around the [unclear] . . . or?

HV: Up in the beaches of Normandy, the 101st Airborne jumped in there.

Q: Do you remember what town you hooked up with them there?

HV: I hate the fury, I hate the fury just call it [unclear]. We went through there, moved on up went through them, they stayed where they were held their area. We moved on right straight up 201st, through the plains. We didn't maybe meet too many civilians at first, we first come off the beaches in it but later on as we got up into the flatlands. Plains of France [unclear] . . . we started running into villages and the people would be standing, usually hiding behind the door you know watching us go by you know. Sometimes they'd throw a [unclear], an apple or pear or something at us you know, and then it got so some GIs were throwing cigarettes back to them. Especially us fellows that didn't smoke still had our cigarettes and we'd give it to them. The kids we started giving them candy bars, oh boy they had nothing but kids following us no matter where we went.

Q: So you were moving through northern France?

HV: Right.

Q: What army were you assigned to?

HV: First Army.

Q: First Army . . . so you skirted around Paris?

HV: Yeah, we skirted around Paris.

Q: That felt shorted that you didn't have an opportunity to go visit Paris?

HV: Lot of the fellows did but I was fortunate. When I was 17, my dad as a World War One vet, they had what they call the pilgrimage to [unclear] . . . the Legion, my dad took me out of high school and two of us went with [unclear] to France. And then from there we went to Greece, so I had been around Paris and I knew what it was like. Didn't interest me anymore. I was really more interested in getting this war over with.

Q: Tell me how the rest of the war went.

HV: Well, it was not too far out of France that I got hit the first time. In the shoulder, and just a flesh wound, didn't keep me out very long, back to my unit. Went through the French plain, crossed the Rhine, one day they pulled us back and we wound up going over in Luxembourg. We stayed in Luxembourg about a week or two, and they moved us back up into the line, and we were involved in the Battle of the Bulge and Hurtgen Forest. That was the worst one of all, was the Hurtgen Forest.

Q: What made the Hurtgen Forest so much worse than the Bulge?

HV: Much worse than the Bulge? The Germans were using treetop explosions. Firing up where the shell would explode in the tree and here you were down underneath nowhere to go.

Q: So the splinters from the trees . . .

HV: Right.

Q: . . . were more . . .

HV: Not only the shrapnel, but the tree limbs [unclear] coming down. Double, double exposure if you want to call it that.

Q: Did you learn to react differently because you were in the forest to artillery?

HV: Oh yes . . . yup.

Q: How so?

HV: Once we got, once about the first or second time that we got shell like that and they started falling. Right away, soon we hear a shell, right away we start to get up close to the tree, get up close to the tree or get out where there was no trees at all.

Q: What else comes to mind when you think of the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest?

HV: In the Hurtgen Forest we lost a lot of good men, a lot of good men.

Q: Were you involved in any of the urban combat at the end of the Hurtgen Forest or just the portion in the forest itself?

HV: Just in the forest itself. There's afterwards they pulled us on out and shipped us on up, we wound up the war up round [unclear] . . .

Q: Well you know we have a lot of different periods to cover here so.

HV: Right.

Q: Let me ask you have you anything else you want to talk about in terms of Northern Europe and World War Two, otherwise we will be coming back to it later.

HV: Before we got to [unclear] I got hit the second time.

Q: What happened?

HV: I got caught in a shell, firefight. Got hit in the arm, again it was just a flesh wound.

Q: Small arms or . . .

HV: Yes small arms.

Q: And that require you to be evacuated or . . .

HV: No just write the age, station, and patch me up you know. Most of the wounds we were getting at that time were what you call life threatening. Lot of shrapnel flying around, more than and shell fire. Most of it what we thought were, we did it down as, a lot of mortar fire we were getting, rather than artillery fire.

Q: So now the end of the war comes [unclear] . . . the end of the war in Europe comes and you're in [unclear]? What happens next?

HV: [Unclear], then the regiment was moved back into Germany, down all pretty close to Munich down close to there. And then they started deploying us back to the states depending on your point system. I came back, back to Fort Dix that's where I was discharged in forty-five.

Q: And then back to Rochester?

HV: Came right back to Rochester and stayed awhile and then for a while I forgot one thing, in forty-two I got married . . . I married a young girl in South, North Carolina. Before we went overseas I was a, another fella and I had a three day pass to go to New York, we were down at Fort Jackson. South Carolina. We were on the bus and the bus broke down in Charlotte so we went to the YMCA to get a room to spend overnight and we came out and the lady from one of the churches said that they were inviting soldiers to come for dinner. Can't beat that, so he and I went to this lady's house for dinner and she had a bunch of young ladies over to evening from her Sunday school. And I've met one young lady we had to go and get some ice cream for the rest of them, I started dating that young lady and a year later we were married.

Q: [Unclear] from North Carolina huh?

HV: Yeah Charlotte, North Carolina. Back when I got out of service lived in Rochester, her and I about a year and a half and we moved to Charlotte.

Q: What were you doing down in Charlotte?

HV: I worked in retail sales, worked at a department store. Uncle Sam called me, in fifty. First of October . . . pardon me.

Q: Let's talk about that now, 1 October. Octobers don't seem to be good months for you.

HV: No.

Q: 1 October 1950, you're called up for . . .

HV: Call from the inactive reserves. I reported to Fort Dix, they just processed me into physical and what have you, and shipped me to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky . . . That's where the reservists were being trained, schedule. I was part of the 101st Airborne, they were the ones that were training us, the 101st Airborne. In November we shipped out, shipped to Korea. I joined the Seventh Division, The Queen's Own, 32nd Infantry Regiment.

Q: [Unclear] . . . Infantry Seventh Division, when and where did you arrive in Korea?

HV: Oh we were [unclear], about the middle of November I believe it was somewhere around there . . . We didn't stay long on the west coast, shipped us right on up.

Q: November fifty?

HV: Yeah.

Q: Okay, now where did you go in Korea?

HV: We came up up above Seoul, South Korea. Joined the Sevenths, and fought up all or more of less along the coast and come over towards the center part of Korea.

Q: So you were in Eighth Army?

HV: Right.

Q: Not Tenth Corp?

HV: No, we were Eighth Army but it was Seventh Infantry Division you know . . . We were part of the Eighth Army.

Q: You were on the west side of Korea?

HV: Right, west side right.

Q: The main Chinese counterattacks first fell in the east side. What was going on with you in the Seventh Division at that time?

HV: We more of less just, more like police street, just going out to see what, you know. Take the patrol out, get down on the street, cross the fields, see if there was any activity any, see if we could find any, anybody around.

Q: And when did you first start to withdraw? You had to start pulling back because . . .

HV: Yeah it was, [unclear] . . . maybe about six or seven months I guess when we were there when we started to pulling back.

Q: Okay, what happened then?

HV: And then we got [unclear] . . . shipped us back up in another section. That's where I got hit the first time.

Q: Or the third time . . .

HV: Third time really, first time in Korea.

Q: What happened then?

HV: I got hit in the leg, and again they just took me back to the hospital. Kept me there about two days and back to the unit . . . The unit was, we were hurting for personnel, we were really hurting bad.

Q: What were your duties at this point?

HV: I was an infantryman . . . I was a, I had a squad, later on I took over the platoon.

Q: You're moving back, eventually your lines going to stabilize . . .

HV: Right stabilize [unclear] and we just, we just like guard duty really. So many men up on the line, the other guys were sitting back eating C rations, K rations or whatever you could get. There's replacing each other back and forth.

Q: And we in Korea for a year?

HV: Thirteen months.

Q: Thirteen months and they rotated you back to the states?

HV: Right, eleventh month I get hit again.

Q: What happened this time?

HV: I was on a patrol and then, squad out on patrol and we ran into a firefight. I get hit in the shoulder.

Q: North Koreans or Chinese?

HV: North Koreans, we thought they appeared to us where we could make out that they were North Koreans. It could had been Chinese but we're almost positive they were North Korean, from their uniforms and that, [unclear] make out we did get one, took one prisoner and he was North Korean.

Q: Right, where'd you get hit this time?

HV: In the shoulder.

Q: Shoulder . . .

HV: Again just, I just didn't move quick enough to get out of the way of that bullet that's all.

Q: Okay, what happened when you got back to the states?

HV: Got back to the states I remember I was reserve. We've been called up for twenty-one months or longer or less sooner released. I got back to Camp Stoneman, California, and we were waiting to see if they were going to turn us loose or when they were going to turn us. One morning there's a notice on the bulletin board for Sergeant Vonglis to report to room so and so at 1000 hours. I'd knock on the door and a voice come on in Harry. Holy molly who is this? I go in and here's my First Sergeant from World War Two days, and there's a Sergeant Major there of the replacement outfit. He said he happen to see my name on the roster, and he said he can get ahold of the whole issue and we can talk up. So he said what are you going to do now? I said well I probably go back home and try start all over again. Says you know you got almost five, six years in you thought about staying in? Well I don't know [unclear], call your wife and find out what she thinks about it so I did, she left it up to me. So went to see him the next day and he said now I got a good assignment for you. You know when you hear that you just start saying . . . yeah I know, heard this story before. He said if I really have Harry, I said you know what is it? He said go home, pick up your wife and daughter, go to New York remember having you go to Salzburg Austria. And I said come on sarg what the pledge, what's the catch is. So they just changed the tour of duty from four years to three years, and they're missing about fifty percent of their NCOs. I talked about it with my wife and we decided we'd go. Went to Salzburg, Austria and that's the one time I wasn't in the infantry. I was assigned to the Adjutant General section, took care of making out all the orders at the orders section, all civilians. I was there for almost four years, I had some corner. And when I came back I, right back to my old stomping grounds Fort Benning, Georgia, back to the Infantry School.

Q: What did you do at the Infantry School?

HV: I was an instructor in weapons.

Q: Heavy, light weapons?

HV: Light weapons, weapons. Rifles, mortars, [unclear] heavy weapons.

Q: And how long were you doing that?

HV: I was there until they, shipped me to Vietnam.

Q: Which year was that?

HV: Sixty-one I went to 'Nam (Vietnam). Got promoted while I was there, made master (Master Sergeant).

Q: Must have been pretty good duty, Benning in the fifties.

HV: Oh yes real good, real good duty . . . Sixty-one, pardon me, Special Forces were screaming for people to come over to instruct the South Vietnamese in the use of our weapons. Now we're talking M1s, O3s, that was the weapons that they had, that we had sent over to them. And Special Force wanted people that could teach them, instruct them on how to use them. So there was the crew that went was thirteen of us, six of us were weapon men, six were communicator and we had one repairman. We thought there was going to be like a school . . . I'd be in a rank of Master, reported in to a Captain or Captain Rogers was his name, Special Forces.

Q: What was his first name?

HV: John . . . He sat there at his desk with his feet up on the desk and spit shined boots down there and sole. And I said yes sir, [unclear] in Korea. He said you're from the Infantry School, and I said yes sir. I got your silence all ready for you. When they assigned a weapons men or a communicator to a regiment in the field, and that's where I spent thirteen months, down the Mekong Delta.

Q: What was that like?

HV: My duty the Sergeant I had with me the communicator, we really hit it lucky. Compared to, after we come back together all of us, compared to what some of the other fellas run into. We run into a regiment early dawn, [unclear] we were little gods or something. I don't know what but we went with them on patrol everything else, but we couldn't had got hit and we were on patrol and we didn't want to get hit. There was nothing ever around us that protecting us they were, it was an outfit that I don't want to say that appreciated us, what we were doing for them, how we're helping them. They used to go in the villages and may get special food out, bring it out to us, the two of us. It wasn't enjoyable really except for a while the [unclear] . . . seeing guys get hit and what have you. But it was a real enjoyment, always reminded when I came back to the states came back to Benning as an instructor. And instructing a class of Vietnamese officers, and come into a classroom one morning and all of a sudden the guy Sergeant Vonglis. Oh my goodness I turned around and looks, here's a young fellow that was a Sergeant in the South Vietnamese Army that had been sent to Officer Candidate School and he and I been together in the same regiment. We had quite a long talk and he you know he told all of the guy there that, [unclear] you've just seen these two Sergeants so we have boy oh boy. But, made you feel good you know that you're really appreciated by some people that you went to help, they appreciate that being helped by them.

Q: Now after your tour in Vietnam, came back to the . . .

HV: Old Infantry School . . .

Q: (Benning or betting) school for boys?

HV: Came right back to Benning.

Q: Back to the Infantry School, weapons department you are in?

HV: Right same place.

Q: And, any changes you noticed at that time?

HV: No other, about the same we had. We had more instructors that had been in combat, more instructors have been in combat. And the biggest share had been in either Korea or Vietnam. Very few of the World War Two veterans, well not too many of them were still on active duty. A few, but we had a lot of Korean and Vietnam veterans that were instructors there in school.

Q: Is Benning where you finished out your . . .

HV: That's where I retired, retired at Fort Benning. No I take it back, I spent six months in Germany, they sent me to Germany, commanding us we can't keep you here after all these years we'll have to send you overseas one more time. So I went and spent six months in Germany with my family, came back and retired. Sixty-five, December sixty-five.

Q: What have you been doing since?

HV: Well when I retired, I got out. Took it easy for just a short period of time and I got involved in sales.

Q: What kind of sales?

HV: I work at hardware store mostly. I never got back into the ice-cream business again after my dad retired, sold out the place I never got back into it. I still eat my share of ice-cream, but I was in retail sales, short period of time I lived in Florida and managed an apartment complex for only just a couple of months, and I didn't care too much for Florida I came back up home. My first wife had passed away in sixty-two . . .

Q: Sorry I pray . . .

HV: And I oh, I worked for a short period of time in Mount Morris. And at the health related facility which is for elderly people, as an electrician. And I met, my present wife.

Q: When did you remarry?

HV: Sixty, seventy-six. Used to steal my tools, I'm working on the second floor she was a nurse and all, every time I was up there, a pair of pliers or screwdriver would be missing. I would always find it at the nurse's station. So I decided my god I got to find out what's happening here. So I left a pair of pliers on the floor by the room I was working in, and I went to the room right across the way that was vacant. Pretty soon

here comes this young lady along, grabs the tool with a big smile on her face and heads to the nurse's station. Right along behind her, year later we were married.

Q: Why was she taking the tools?

HV: She's trying to get my attention I think. And I'm eighteen years older than she is but she says that doesn't make any difference, doesn't. She had a pardon me, three children. She had a daughter that was, year after her and I were going together and got married, and I gave her away to her husband and I had nothing to do with her. She had a boy that was just graduated from high school and she had one boy in grade school, and I adopted the boy in grade school. He's still, him and he's married now, and I have a grandson . . .

Q: Congratulations . . .

HV: We made close as a family real close. My family is, just got into the same thing. Most of my family now my brothers and sisters are all over California, but I have one sister that lives in [unclear], and we get together quite a bit. Fact my, my son by my first marriage lives in Georgia and I have a grandson who's now in service at what Campbell, Kentucky.

Q: What does he do?

HV: He's an infantryman, and the last time we talked I guess he's going to make it a career. [Unclear] he's been in just a little over a year, he just got promoted to Corporal.

Q: One hundred and first, 101?

HV: No that is, he's taking [unclear] there. He was originally stationed at Fort Benning when he went in, when he enlisted. He's taking Airborne training and assault, Air Assault training . . . And he has not been assigned to actually to a regular unit as of yet. He's married and I have a great-granddaughter. But he keeps telling me you got to keep the Vonglis name in the Army.

Q: [Unclear], he's got a point there.

HV: He's a fine young boy, a fine young man. He's, I've met his Company Commander, his Platoon Sergeant and First Sergeant. I went down there and they all speak highly of him, he's really got the incentive to get ahead, get ahead. Like I told him that's fifty percent, if you don't like it get out, [unclear] you're become the most miserable person in the world if you don't like it in there. I spent, after I came out, came back here in New York, I became active with the retirees. I was co-chairman of the Army Retiree Program at Fort Drum . . . spent four years as co-chairman up there.

Q: How did you find that?

HV: Oh I really, really liked that I used to go up there, [unclear] . . . we would meet, and it's usually for a weekend. Usually every quarter we would meet up there. And, I got to go around the different posts close by, talk with retirees. And then I, after I was there for two years I was appointed to the Chief of Staff's Retirees Council in Washington. I spent four years with the Retiree Council in Washington. Traveled to, I went down to my old [unclear] Fort Benning long time. I went to Texas, made four different tours to different posts to acquaint the military with the retiree program.

Q: Are you still active with the Army Retiree Programs?

HV: I am more of not active at all, I am hospitalized, bed-ridden. Eight years ago I woke up one morning and couldn't walk, couldn't move or nothing. I had three herniated discs in the lower back, and now I get around with this walker. At first I would have, they had to lift me in and out of bed even. [Unclear] . . . physical therapy have come their long ways. And now I wear a brace just below my knee, gives me [unclear] . . . I have no use for my feet, I cannot move my feet [unclear] . . . with this walker but I get around . . .

Q: The back problem, is it service related?

HV: No, [unclear] . . . disassociated with it service related [unclear]. I still maintain contact with my old friends in the service.

Q: World War Two, Korean, and Vietnam?

HV: Yeah.

Q: Must be quite a circle of friends.

HV: Yes I do have.

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Q: Tape two, interview with Mr. Harry Vonglis on 25 April 2001, talking about Fort Niagara.

HV: First Sergeant, Sergeant [unclear] . . . from World War One days, Germans descent, saw the name and says you're a Greek aren't you? I say I'm Greek descent yes. Well he says I have a good job for you he says all the Greeks are cooks, so I'll going to send you to the mess hall. I said no sarg, but I did spend about a month in the mess hall and finally I went back to straight duty.

Q: What were you doing in the mess hall?

HV: I was ordering [unclear], rations and what have you, making sure it gets put away and back. Never did any cooking.

Q: Let's go, let's stick on Fort Niagara for a few minutes because friends of mines, colleagues other historians are trying to restore Fort Niagara and part of the history is World War Two right and the pre-war period. What was Fort Niagara like in those days?

HV: Fort Niagara in those days was, more of less really like being in college, like a dormitory. We had recruits instruction going on, doing close order drill, morning classrooms and learning military justice and what have you. But the main duty then was just guard duty, guard duty . . . Parades, every time we turned around they were having a parade Niagara Falls, they follow a regiment a whole regiment out would parade at Niagara Falls.

Q: So most of your day was spent with basic soldiering kind of things?

HV: Yeah, basic soldiering.

Q: A lot of, what other kind of things would you be busy with? Take care of your uniform or . . .

HV: Take care of uniforms, a lot of going out as a group in small area out there [unclear]. Every time we turned around we're taking time on the rifle range, because see the M1 was new then, it was brand new. And getting us in, indoctrinating the use of the M1, what it could do and what it would do for us as soldiers. We spent a lot of time on the range firing the weapons, and learning how to strip it, take it down, clean it down, that was our main thing was. We would get everyone acquainted with that M1. You as a, an infantryman that's what you're going to live with.

Q Now these days, Basic Training was conducted in the regiment?

HV: Oh yeah.

Q: So you didn't go to a Basic Training camp?

HV: No no, no no. We had, the regiment had a they called it Recruit Instruction. You went every morning there's a recruit, you went out. When I went in there was about a hundred people, from the different companies. See there were only two Battalions and Headquarters at Fort Niagara at that time, the other time was up at Fort Ontario which is up along Lake Ontario. And all the recruits new men would meet, we learn how to close order drill, we learned how to fire the weapons and what have you, and it was about almost three weeks before the new would turn us, what they call returning you back to duty, when you went back to your company or whatever with what you learned, [unclear] with whatever you were doing.

Q: So you won't, weren't totally thrown into a company not knowing left face from right face . . .

HV: No no, all before you [unclear] . . . When you, each night you went back to your own company in the evening and you had your mess hall with them and lived in the

barracks. But you didn't know formations with your company until after you finish Recruit Instruction.

Q: How did the old hands treat you?

HV: The old hands some of them were, would come around and see you maybe working with your weapon or something, [unclear] . . . sit down with you in order to try to help you along. Others would say [unclear] you're a recruit get out of here you know, would have nothing to do with you. But if you were the older soldiers, took an interest in the young soldiers. Tried to show us how to field strip the weapon, how to put it back together and stuff like that

Q: Now how would you compare the Army that you knew at Fort Niagara with the Army of the fifties or the sixties?

HV: A lot closer relationship between the men in the forties when I enlisted.

Q: And why was that?

HV: I don't know, there wasn't as much what I call dog-eat-dog. [Unclear] . . . everybody was just trying to see how far ahead they could get into taking care who they stepped over or walked over to get there.

Q: It was less of that?

HV: Less of that, less of that in the old Army. More concern especially with now I know and a lot of the other Companies it was the same way but with the young soldiers, [unclear] bringing along as a young soldier you know, treat you along the right way they should do, the right way to go. [Unclear] keep yourself out of trouble.

Q: Does that have something to do with the fact that you probably were going to stay with that regiment?

HV: They were to do either a discharge or requested a transfer everywhere else.

Q: So for all you knew and for all anybody around you knew, you could've spent your entire tour at Fort Niagara.

HV: Could've spent your own entire tour at Fort Niagara, but then the regiment like I said was transferred to the Eighth Infantry Division, which was being activated that time, we went to Fort Jackson.

Q: And what was Fort Niagara physically like in those days I mean . . .

HV: I compared it to a college campus really because I spent a couple of years at a college campus that sort of reminded me of just a college campus. The build, the barracks were all the way around, had nice sidewalks to walk on, nice parade field. I

visited several times since then and its still, still looks the same it hasn't changed a bit, it hasn't changed a . . .

Q: You spent a lot of your time in those days keeping the post up?

HV: Yeah, sure anything happened [unclear] . . . it was still daylight you were out getting it fixed up, policed up. It was first thing in the morning I mean I don't care who you were everybody went out for police call. We went down through the parade field in the walks in there and everything was picked up, just cleaned right out period.

Q: So more spit and polish in those days?

HV: Yes much more, much more.

Q: Give us some examples.

HV: On Saturdays, Saturday morning was always inspection and when I say inspection it was not only of you the individual, but also of your area where you lived, the barracks. It went through the barracks with a fine tooth comb, if your blanket wasn't turned on just right when you come back yours would be in a pile, sitting on top of your bed for you to remake it. The same thing when we went outside and when we went out for, for a retreat it was in uniform. Was just nothing on you had your complete uniform and it was almost common for me to check the guy next to me. It was your epaulets on right, your badges on right, and each guy would check with everybody else to make sure that everybody was tip-top. Number one shape when, when they went out to stand out there. They didn't have to have no officer come down and tell them this is wrong that's wrong, we felt we help correct each other, keep ourselves straight.

Q: What about the role of the Sergeant most days, was it different than it was later on?

HV: Yeah, Sergeant was like your father. I mean like really, Sergeant was like your father. He came through and if he saw that you were what I want to say like sitting around and just [unclear] around. First thing you know he gets you over, sit on your bunk with you, you know, something bothering you, you have any troubles, you got any problems at home? Like I said just, just like a father to you. Yes, that's just the way that they were. The men that were under them, that's they were their men, period.

Q: Did you see very much of officers in those days?

HV: Yes, especially Lieutenants. There was nothing for you to be sitting around even and all of a sudden a Lieutenant come in, somebody hollow attention and everybody jump up and Lieutenant says at ease. You know that would come in and he'd do the same thing. He'd go around amongst the fellows knowing that to breeze with you, you know, and maybe talk about a hockey game that was going on in town, or we're going to play baseball this weekend or what.

Q: Was that different, were officers different than they were they say the sixties?

HV: Yeah, they seemed what I want to say, they seemed to be closer to the men than they were in the sixties. For sure they knew the man like they know where he come from, what he did before he came into service, was he married or planning to get married or what.

Q: What was discipline like in those days?

HV: Discipline? Well there was no, when they said fall in everybody fell in period. There was no lollygagging round or nothing. When a command was given, people executed them in a hurry out on the double and there were no questions, no questions to ask. When we [unclear] . . . to go to retreat parade, you think for gone on you think we're going to parade before the President. Men were sharp, everybody took a pride in themselves and that's what I think it all centered around the pride in them being in the service. Used to spend many times, we'd spent hours just shining our shoes, just shining our boots getting ready for inspection or what have you.

Q: Where does that part come from?

HV: I don't know where it comes from, whether it was the unit. Of course when we went into the unit, you learned the history of that unit. The unit I was in, the 28th Infantry pardon me, and that was the 1st Division of World War One. The insignia come from France, it was taken from the French flag of one of the provinces flags, and was given to the regiment. Cantigny, the Lions of Cantigny, and when I went to France I went to that province, and that province still has just two lions and a space where a third one was. And that's where it goes back to that, the people were proud of the fact that they were in an outfit that had seen so much service, had been recognized as such, as such. The 28th Infantry also we paraded, formed security line when President Roosevelt visited Niagara Falls.

Q: Tell me about that.

HV: Well they said that we were going to have, they were going to perform an honor guard for the President. Well you never seen so many people out scrubbing up their uniforms or brass, getting their hats all ready. We didn't carry any weapons we went just as individuals in our uniforms, we were shoulder to shoulder on the highway when the President drove up true. And we always that was, we always used to say that, well by god we stood honor guard for the resident, how about you guys what did you do? It was a regiment that had a lot of esteem in itself so and when [unclear] . . . some of the first things we'd do to instill them on what the regiment was about and we were proud to be in it. If you weren't proud, we used to tell them if you don't want to like it or something, transfer. Well it was an inner, inner pride being in that regiment.

Q: Was there kind of a cycle to the year at Fort Niagara I mean were there seasonal differences in what you were doing?

HV: No it was about, it was the same all time, all the time.

Q: What [unclear] . . . do for recreation?

HV: Pardon me, for recreation we had a NCO club and we were close to town, where we would get into town. There were a lot of theaters in town, there weren't that many bars. In fact if I remember there was only three bars at Niagara Falls at that time when I was in service. Servicemen were welcomed in uniform, [unclear] . . . most of us went in uniform. Some went in civilian clothes but the biggest share of it were in uniform, and the people in that town they recognize this as a serviceman, there weren't no nasty remarks or anything like that. Only time we've got nasty remarks we went to South Carolina. Used to have signs [unclear] no dogs or soldiers allowed, in restaurants. Until we'd been there a while you know what I mean, and the people got used to us and saw that we weren't as bad as they thought we were. We [unclear], in South Carolina we became one of the town's adopted our regiment because during the maneuver time while we did things for the people on the farms.

Q: So relationship was pretty good between Fort Niagara and the community?

HV: Oh yes, Fort Niagara was a good relationship, good relationship. In fact when we left, the whole railroad yard of the highway down all the way through was all aligned with people. With people when we left on a Sunday we marched down and board the train and left, and the people were just hollering and screaming when we left, they really hated to leave us, hated for us to leave.

Q: Well let's move ahead then. We talked some about World War Two, we're talking too much yet about Korea. What stands out in your mind the most about Korea?

HV: Well most, the thing that stands out most was that a, it was so hard to get to a talking relationship with the Korean people, like they were afraid you know that a. We would leave and the North Koreans, would come in and then they would really catch in holy hell. That was them, you could and talked with that was their biggest concern you know. We would leave and then they'd be and the North Koreans were just about murder them because they had associated with the Allied forces. Well after a period of time, they got more or less they got to where they would trust us and that was the biggest thing was overcoming that fear of the Allied forces. And once they did when then we had a good relationship with it, especially once we had to conduce soldiers with us, that made a big difference it helped to ease the tension between the military and the civilians. We had to conduce [unclear], that's a fine [unclear] soldier with us too.

Q: And those were Korean augmentees to the United States Army?

HV: Yup United States Army. But they were really some of them were real fine, turned out to be real fine soldiers, real fine soldiers.

Q: What were combat operations like in Korea?

HV: Combat operations were, so many times we [unclear] lands that we didn't know about and we were not that familiar with, not that familiar with. But after we'd been there a while and had moved out into different areas, we came to hold our own, hold our own against the [unclear]. But they were not so much of what I want to say, a stand up force. Their more on the guerilla warfare side, hit and miss, hit and run hit and run, and once a great while we'd be able to really pin them down into a firefight, and that was the end of that. We had a lot of what I want to say, in the outfit I was with the 32nd Infantry out of the Seventh Division, they were a lot of them were career soldiers and it was a lot different. Later on when we got so many replacements and you know and they weren't as a cognizant of what we were doing or how we were going to do it. We had to gradually you know trick training teach them and we found that, I found out myself in Korea that a lot of the replacement we get they resented the fact that they were there. And it made it hard on them and it made it hard on us in try to get them indoctrinated and know what to do, doing the fact that they had their resentment. And we had others that boy I tell you that you were just, couldn't couldn't wait to get going, wait to get going. Usually the soldiers that resented that fact after a while after a time especially when they would see a buddy or two get hit or get killed, they would start to really mellow in and start to fit in the situation. But at first we had so many young soldiers coming over here that boy they just hated the fact that they were there. They had to sort of overcome, they had to like our old Sergeant says we got a baby [unclear]. But a lot of them turned out to be real good soldiers, real good soldiers, proud of them, proud to serve with some of them.

Q: Ever heard of the term the Forgotten War used?

HV: Oh yes.

Q: What do you think of that?

HV: I don't really history you know here we went, lost so many men we lost over there and men sacrificed their time, parts of their lives, just just forgot all about it, it never happened. It, well actually if you want to really go back down to it, the only time the soldiers really appreciated when there's a shooting war and when our country is involved in it. See we weren't really involved in Korea other than furnishing troops and people, there's still even people today that resent the military because I think it is because they associated the military and so many countries received where the military became so strong they just took over. And I think that a lot of Americans figured that, that could happen to us and I don't think that it ever could because of the way our people are. Where people are educated and brought up, that always it always got to me when I used to places in the states here, places would say like I told you down in South

Carolina when I first went down there, soldiers and dogs not allowed. But later on they came to find out that we weren't as bad as they thought we were, and later on like I said our regiment was adopted by one town. The people now you go down south and it's a totally different attitude, the way that people look at soldiers and of course a lot of the animosity against soldiers was created by the soldiers themselves the way that they acted, the way that they acted.

Q: When you were in Vietnam it was very early on in our involvement in the conflict, you see any signs at that time that indicated that Vietnam would become the problem it would?

HV: Yes.

Q: How so?

HV: It the, wasn't any what I want to call it real relationship or, passing of ideas between the Vietnamese and our American forces. We were there and they just put up with us, they didn't really until later on, later years I understand before they really what do you want to see, accepted us. That first they were afraid of the North Vietnamese and they didn't know whether we as, as Americans and as Allied forces would be able to keep the North Vietnamese from coming down and taking over all of South Vietnam. Later on as they found out that we were strong enough that we could resist and that we would be able to protect them and that's what they were looking for the South Vietnamese, someone to protect them from the North Vietnamese.

Q: What did you think of all that came afterwards you know they're anti-war demonstrations and Tet [unclear] withdrawing.

HV: I just have, I don't have use for people that are demonstrations like this, it's uncalled for, it's uncalled for, they just stopped to think, they just stopped to think. Oh I've been involved with, like I said when I was down south there and First World War Two, soldiers weren't wanted in many places. Until afterwards like I said they got to know us and then we weren't as bad thought or had been told it we were, but any demonstrations like that just I tried to keep away from because I'm afraid that if I got seen that I've got involved with it, and I would be, I would be in real trouble, real trouble. Because I believe in my country right or wrong, I still believe in my country.

Q: Is there something you'd want civilians or schoolchildren to know about the Army based on your number of years, what would it be?

HV: I like all of our youngsters to know that this country was won by men dying. Men that gave up their life, men that put a lot of time and a lot of time out there protecting this country, making it safe for them to grow up as youngsters. That after we have the but we should honor our soldiers just respect them, you don't have to go around hugging them or patting them on the back but just respect them for what they are doing.

Q: Well when you look back at it all, what sticks out to most about your time in the military?

HV: Yes one of the things is the comradeship that you develop, especially when you are in combat. When the bullets are flying that's when you find out who your real buddies and real friends are.

Q: How so, how do you find that out when the bullets are flying?

HV: When the bullets are flying they're the ones that are staying there with you, they'd not the ones that are running behind you, or disappearing or hiding. So many times, first bullets would start to fly somewhere are long gone, it's the ones that stay there with you. I have a, I have a case of mine when I went in World War Two, it was at Fort Niagara and I'd only been about not quite a week, young soldier has been in about almost a month was from the Rochester area. He's a Belgian, his folks are Belgium and I never drove me a Willy, he started to show me the little funeral things about how your bunk should be made you know, how your clothes should be in the wall locker and how they should be hung up on that little things you know that working gradually but he really, we became real close friends, real close in fact we used to date girls together. And several times we would come back while we were still at Fort Niagara we came back to Rochester and he lives in [unclear] the suburbs and but we'd always get together his family and then we come to my family and my folks got to know him real well. We went overseas and he had one platoon and I had another platoon and we come up off the beaches and my platoon he's been going all night long and we hear a little dog, Jerry told the Company Commander he says well he said, my platoon we've been sitting on our dead-ass all night long, says we're going to go and take care of Harry's place on the line. That's all right if that's what you want to do so he moved up on the line and about two hours later together we got into a firefight and Jerry got hit. Look at my place, he'd taken my place, got hit was evacuated back badly shrapnel. Does discharges totally disabled and we, even till today we will maintain contact with each other. Many times we get together, I go to Rochester . . . he comes out this way you [unclear] . . . We'd sit down and have a beer just talking about our old times together you know, he was totally lost almost half his stomach, [unclear] . . . He's married now and has two children, he's the real trooper, we always remember each other, never missed a holiday you know. Pardon me, when I got married this time he was there at the wedding, he and his wife [unclear]. Something that when you're, when you're in combat and those shells are flying around you it does something to you with the fella that's sitting right next to you [unclear] . . . foxhole alongside you. Something you don't forget.

Q: Any lost thoughts?

HV: Pardon.

Q: Any last comments or thoughts?

HV: Nope I just, I don't regret a day of my service. I had a lot of good experiences and a lot of headaches but, I join and like my grandson he keeps asking me, he's in service now and talking with him he's been in a little over a year now almost about pretty close to two years. And he's going to make a career out of it, he's talking to me about it. I'm telling him it's what you make of it, it's what you make of it, you either make it or break it . . . Well he said tell me this, tell me that, [unclear] your find out just don't get your nose up in the air you're going to learn. And he likes to, he and I like to get together and sit down and back the debris around, what they're doing now and what they used to do back in the old days.

Q: [Unclear] . . . come to any particular conclusions or?

HV: No, [unclear] . . . How you treat your fellow soldier, how he reacts the way that you treat him he treats you but. I'm really, I'm proud of him not only because he's going to make a career [unclear], but is a real young fella that is thinking. Funny part about it is he took his Basic at Fort Benning, and one day he said he was walking down the street, civilian hollered at him and he went over, he said where are you from, Georgia down there is where my son lives. Where is your father from, how about your grandfather? Come to find out that this is a fella that I had served at Benning, he was an instructor civilian, and he was still at Benning as a senior instructor . . . So he saw the name, saw the name on his uniform. But, like I've always said the military is what you make of it.

Q: Good, thank you.

HV: Yes sir.

Q: Good interview.

HV: Thank you sir.