Thomas J. Hewitt
Veteran

Hudson Falls High School
Interviewers

Interviewed on December 30th, 2003
Hudson Falls, New York

Q: What is your full name?
WH: Thomas J. Hewitt.

Q: Where and when were you born?
WH: I was born in Hudson Falls, NY, in 1923.

Q: Do you have any pre-war education?
WH: No.

Q: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?
WH: Well, I was walking the streets of Hudson Falls, NY and when it happened on December 7th, everybody was talking about it, so I happened to find out.

Q: How did you feel about it?
WH: I was very mad at the time because I knew that a lot of people were compromised. One of my friends sent a letter to Hudson Falls for the person that got killed and that was Randolph Holmes. My best friend also got killed.

Q: When did you enter the service?
WH: I went down for induction on February the 4th of 1943 and they gave me a week off. Then I took a bus ride to Whitehall, NY to get a train on February 11th. Then from there I went to Camp Crowder in New York for about two weeks and then I went to the air force, and they brought me to Atlantic City, NJ.

Q: Did you enlist or get drafted?
WH: I was drafted, I tried to enlist in the Marine Corps and the Navy, but they didn't take any hammer tools.

Q: What did your basic training involve?
WH: Basic training, after I left Atlantic City I went to Camp Crowder, NY for basic training. I went there for a six-week course.

Q: When did you go overseas?
WH: I was out in California when I got my order to go overseas. I went back to the east coast, and I left on January 31st of 1944. I then arrived around 40 days later.

Q: What did you guys do overseas?
WH: What we did was, we stayed at the King's palace for about two weeks and then from there we went to Naples in Italy.

Q: What did you do there?
WH: I was a communications specialist, we used to send planes around bases and so forth and we called them sardines. The sardines would go over to the opposition and monitor, then come back and tell us how many planes, how many ships, how many bombs there were. Or they would tell us how many planes or buildings were destroyed. Anything that the opposition did, we communicated back.

Q: How did you stay in touch with your loved ones?
WH: Oh, I just wrote letters to them, not very often probably, maybe once a month. But you couldn't tell them where you were so instead of saying you were at a certain place across the world, you would say somewhere across the globe. You never told them where you were.

Q: What memory stands out the most?
WH: That's a good question, well it used to be we'd have to go get our water from a pump. One day I remember this fella was coming down from the hills with a wagon and he hit a mine. We didn't know there was a mine and when we looked up, the whole wagon went up in the air…and while we were there Joe Louis put on exhibitions for us and a singing group came and while they had a boxing ring, the group would sing and then they would put on the boxing matches.

Q: Where did you go after Corsica?
WH: Went to Corsica, I went to Florence, Italy, and I lived in the Swiss embassy. We had the Hungarians prisoners of war do all the cooking. Before I went to Florence, Italy, I had to go to a hospital in Rome where they had me stay for

about 10 days. While I was recuperating, I used to go down and swim. Then I went back to Corsica and then from there I went to Florence, Italy.

Q: Why did they make you go to the hospital?
WH: Because I couldn't walk, my legs were giving me problems.

Q: What did you do in Corsica?
WH: We just stayed there and waited to find out what our next orders were. That led us to go up into the mountains. We lived in tents and made our own place for a fire and used the gas that was coming in to make our own fire. We stayed there until the Spring of 1945.

Q: What happened after the Po Valley?
WH: After the Po Valley we went all the way up into the Swiss embassy and we went up looking for the second wave of Germans. We were looking for any stragglers of the Germans. I brought home a German helmet that was there. Then we went all the way up to Verona and when we went there, there were stacks and stacks of daggers and bayonets. I remember putting one of those in my duffel bag and taking it home. But anyways, from there the war was over in Europe but the war was not over in Japan. So, we got our orders to go and on our way aboard the boat we were one of the first ones back to the United States.

Q: Did you have any interactions with civilians?
WH: No not really, except for the prisoners of war.

Q: How many people did you lose?
WH: We only lost one man.

Q: So, where did you go after Po Valley?
WH: We went to Po Valley, but as I said the war ended so instead of going up further, we went back to New Jersey.

Q: What are your thoughts on going back to the United States?
WH: I think it really shortened the war. I think it saved a lot of lives because I know that over there in Japan a lot of my good friends died, one of them as I mentioned was my buddy, Curtis Samuels. Also, Art Smith, he was an excellent pitcher, he could have gone to the big leagues, and he got killed.

Q: Do you have any feelings about what you have done?

WH: Not really, you know after all these years you don't have that mental edge you had when you were growing up. I mean I was only 18-19 years old.

Q: When you came home were you nervous at all?
WH: No, I was discharged, and I came home in September of 1945, I had to go back. I belong to the American allegiance, and I have been a member of that for 29 years.

Q: Did the service have any impact on your education?
WH: Oh yes, and it made a big difference as far as education is concerned. It gave me a chance to go to college and I was one of the first ones to go to Skidmore and graduate from Skidmore college. I went to Skidmore college, got my degree from there. Then I went to Oneonta Student Teacher College, got my master's degree and went into teaching. I taught for three years at Harvard from 1955-58. Then in 1958 I retired and taught as a teacher and coached bowling.

Q: Were you called in when FDR died?
WH: Yes, when he died, I was in the hospital in Rome.

Q: What were your thoughts on him?
WH: He was a good president, he did wonders.

Q: Do you have any thoughts on having to go overseas?
WH: Well, they gave me the chance to go to different places, I went to Rome. I was one of about six people that had the audience from the Pope. I went to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. You know we went into the colosseum and by the colosseum where it was, was a balcony where Mussolini…and as you know Mussolini and his wife were killed and hung up by their feet. Oh Clark, yes, General Clark. When we were at the King's Palace there were terrace steps that went down like that…because at that time the casino started to scam in a very bad way, so we had to check on it all the time. Well, there was only one of them around here.

Q: How did you guys communicate?
WH: Well, the first thing you did when you woke up in the morning was do a caller's sentence. Then stand up and you went to your job and sat down teletype and all these codes that came in and you'd set up all your messages all day long.

Q: Were you ever close to being killed?

WH: No, except for the time when I was close to a landmine.

Q: What type of codes did you guys use?
WH: Well, you had for instance, they used to come in from the base and they would be already coded XYZ.

Q: Did you know what they meant?
WH: Most of the time no. I would just relay the information.

Q: What did you do in Po Valley?
WH: In Po Valley we went up on the second day and we did communications plus we went searching for homes of any Germans that were stragglers.

Q: Did you ever fly?
WH: Oh yes, I was attached to the Air Force, so I used to fly from Corsica over to Rome, New York. Then go back and fly to the base.

Q: Did you ever come into close contact with an enemy?
WH: Not really, no.

Q: When you were searching for Germans did you ever find any?
WH: Never found one.

Q: Do you think your family knew what you were doing when you were over there?
WH: No, they had no idea because you couldn't tell them. You weren't supposed to tell them where you were located.

Q: How do you think they felt about you not being around and having to write them letters?
WH: Well, I remember someone telling me that my mother used to put up our letters that I sent home in the paper…very embarrassing.

Q: So, you got married when you came home?
WH: Yes, I used to know your aunt in Hudson Falls, I would go to her house all the time. Then I got married in 1947…and we've been married now for a long time…56 years.

Q: How do you think this regard compares to the other wars?

WH: Well, I always say there's the Vietnam war, the Korean war, but when I talk to someone, they always say you weren't in the big war. The big war where you had every country, and we had the Germans and Japan and I think it's important to remember that it's not only that war but every war.

Q: Do you know how many casualties resulted from World War 2?
WH: No, we have never gotten that information but we know it's true because so many Jewish people lost their lives.

Q: Were any of your friends' prisoners of war?
WH: A fella over in Lake Lucerne by the name of George was a prisoner of war. Before I went to war when I used to work, my best friend was signing something on this one day in 1942 and him and another fella of ours from Fort Everette said, "C'mon were going to Glens Falls" and I said I can't go to Glens Falls I have to go to work at the pharmacy. So, the two of them found a ride to Glens Falls and, on the ride, back a fella had stolen a car. He had gotten into an accident on the corner down the street. It burst into flames, the fella from Fort Everette was in the middle, my friend was on the outside. He survived that but then gets killed. You wonder sometimes.

Q: What's the most beautiful place you've been overseas?
WH: I'd say probably the Vatican. I enjoyed that; I enjoyed the Vatican.

Q: Would you ever live there?
WH: No. I would but I don't think your aunt would.

Q: How do you feel about young people today?
WH: Oh, I like them, being a teacher, I've always enjoyed…I taught 5th and 6th grade, then I taught 7th and 8th grade math then I was a school administrator. I've always been around young people…and the young people today and this generation, when they say there is something wrong with them, I don't agree.

Q: How do you feel about the war and how it ended?
WH: I think it had to be done and I am a little concerned about the number of soldiers that are killed every day, it's like 2 or 3 every day.

Q: Do you ever find it hard to talk about your story?
WH: The only time I talk about my story is to my granddaughters and you guys, I never talk about it. You'll find that I can remember when I was a kid back when I

was your age…World War 1. Afterwards, the people that came back they never talked about, and I think today that anybody who's been in the war, they don't talk about it.

Q: What about the soldiers of the Vietnam war?
WH: I felt sorry for them really, they didn't appreciate them as much and I think no matter what war it is, whether it's World War 2, or the Vietnam war, or Korean war, you know people are getting killed and you must respect them. That's its girls?

Q: Yes, thank you.