

**William F. Sheehan
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on June, 6 2003
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY**

Q: Could you give me your full name, place of birth and date of birth, please.

WS: Surely Mike, William F. Sheehan. Born in Stillwater NY, on December 11th, 1921.

Q: What was your background prior to entering the military service?

WS: I was a graduate of Stillwater High School, Class of 1939. After setting pins at a local bowling alley called Stillwater Recreation Center for about 6 months, I went to Albany Business College. And received a one year Executive Secretarial Diploma. That was my entire education prior to World War II.

Q: Where were you, and what do you recall of your reaction to the news about Pearl Harbor?

WS: I was in the Stillwater Recreation Center, Bowling. At that time, I was night clerk at the Albany FBI office in Albany. I was bowling on a Sunday afternoon, the day of Pearl Harbor, when the office called my home and I was summons to work, to get down to Albany as soon as possible. I think I arrived down at the Albany office around 7:00, and I believe I recall working until about 1:00 the next afternoon. It was a busy night, and a busy early morning.... Believe me.

Q: Do you know what your initial reaction was when you heard about this attack?

WS: Yes, I was both shocked and sad. I didn't know what it would mean. Except I thought, "gee", maybe we would be invaded by the Japanese. It's just a terrible reaction in my mind at that time.

Q: What was the FBI's reaction to that? Were they really tightening security around the city, state? Do you recall what was going on?

WS: I don't recall the initial reaction that day, other than everyone was excited and troubled, and all the personnel were summoned to work. I have a vague

recollection that shortly after that time there was an immense concern and drive concerning so called enemy aliens. And that was my first association or knowledge of anything of that nature.

Q: What were some of your duties between that time and when you went into military service in the FBI?

WS: As a night clerk, the responsibility was enormous. I marvel to this day, how at a young age of about 19 to 21 or so, I was able to handle the diverse tasks that were assigned to me. I was a file clerk, I was a typist, I ran copies on the so-called mimeograph machine, I sent out teletype messages to the 56 offices that were located throughout the country, I received telegraphic messages, I handled the switchboard duties. So, I had a nice writing of experiences for a young fellow, but I enjoyed the comradery of the staff and personnel. The agents used me wonderful, and I had a very nice relationship with the special agent in charge and the number one man, his assistant.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

WS: I had two deferments, 6 months each. As I was classified as a confidential file indexed analysts. The person on night duty had to made decisions when telephone calls came in, whether there was some sort of real scare, or someone was making a call just as a prank or whatever. By the summer however, of 1943, I just had the feeling that most of my friends are in the service and they had been in for 6 months or a year, and I thought well although I may be important to the FBI here, I felt I should contribute to the military. So, I was drafted in September of 1943.

Q: Where was your induction center?

WS: I was named acting corporal out of Mechanicville, and the induction center was located, well we originally were sworn in in Albany on September 11th. There were 10 from Mechanicville and two of us from Stillwater. Those that went in the Navy were given a week's leave. I believe three out of the 12 went into the Navy. The other 9 of us were given three weeks' furlough and the actual induction center forest was Camp Upton, down near Patchogue on Long Island.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

WS: Basic training was given partially at Camp Upton. I was assigned to the unit that received so called commando training for two to three weeks. It was a terrific training and I think I lost something like 12 to 15 pounds. I thought for sure I was headed for the rangers, the infantry or whatever. Shortly after

completing that training, to my amazement, I was sent back to Camp Upton to sell insurance to the inductees. Then I was later transferred to Fort Ontario, where I completed my basic training.

Q: Did you receive any other special training outside of the ranger training?

WS: No I did not

Q: When were you sent overseas?

WS: Well, it was quite a story behind that. I was classified as a 405-typist clerk. I was blessed with great accurate hands for typing. At that time, I could type 75 words a minute over a sustained period without making any errors. So, I was in about 10 camps in the country. I was in California in December of 1944 waiting assignment to the Pacific. The so-called Battle of the Bulge happened. It started, I believe around December 15. Within two weeks, so sort of executive order was issued, and if a soldier didn't have flat feet, didn't wear glasses, or didn't have dentures, for the most part, most of those men like myself, were transferred to the infantry. So, I went from California, down to Camp Livingston in Louisiana, just outside of Alexandria for either two or three weeks of infantry training. And finally went overseas late in February or early in March of 1945.

Q: I guess you went over into a replacement center?

WS: Yes, I did. There is an interesting story there. When I arrive in Le Harve, all the ammunition I had in my ammo belt was taken from me, and that seemed to suggest that during the Battle of the Bulge, our troops must have used up just about all their supply of ammunition and whatever. About three days later, I was standing on the Rhine River in Bonn without any ammunition whatsoever and carrying an M1 rifle.....Amazing.

Q: Could you tell us your duties after that? Where you were assigned and what some of your duties were?

WS: Shortly after standing on the Rhine River in Bonn, I was transferred to what they called a repel dep, a replacement depot. I believe that there were approximately two hundred of us in that repel dep. And the purpose of sending us there, was to have us available as infantry replacements to take the place of those who were either wounded or killed on the front lines. I think I was in this repel dep about two days, and fortunately [unclear]. a lieutenant colonel, I think his name was John Bradley drove up in a Jeep, and he was seeking two men out of 200 who could type. There were three of us, and he decided he would take the three of us. He moved us back about ten miles from where this repel dep was,

and from that period on while I was overseas, I served in the headquarters company of the 7th corps.

[Tape Interruption]

Q: So, you served in the headquarters company of the 7th corps. Could you tell us what you did there?

WS: 7th corps headquarters company primarily consisted of military police. During the day, they would go out in their vehicles and check on the activities of other soldiers, to see if they were driving in an overcrowded vehicle, see whether they were wearing their helmets, and they would write them up for any military infractions. They would bring those tickets to our paperwork what have you back to the office, and the two other men in the office, fellow by the name of Bob Cronin, who later became mayor of Glens Falls, and a fellow by the name of John Patton, no relation to the General Patton and myself would type up papers in accordance with the violations.

Q: I see you ran into a famous Baseball player over there.

WS: Yes, I did, it was really prior to going overseas. After I was assigned to Fort Ontario, I was later reassigned to Pine Camp. I was in a unit of the second service command, that primarily consisted of teachers and attorneys and those who had proficient typing and accounting skills. What would happen was this, when men were inducted to the Army and Camp Upton or Fort Dix and they scored between 65 and 75 on their original induction test, they would be sent to our second service command unit. These former teachers would give them training for two weeks to a month and they would be retested with the hope and expectation that their scores would improve. If and when they improved, they were shipped elsewhere to start their Army service. While I was at Pine Camp, Albert "red" Schoendienst appeared one Saturday morning. The major in charge of our unit recognized his name. It seems as if in the previous year, Schoendienst that played with Rochester in the international league, had been a sensational player. So "red" was with us for just a few weeks and then transferred on. Only recently I've discovered, that "red" shortly after leaving Pine Camp, was discharged from the service in Florida. And I always wondered why he was discharged so suddenly. A book was just written last year by a Boston author, and he talked to "red" about his life, and it seems when "red" was a real young fellow, he was playing and some clip entered one of his eyes. The doctor told his mother that he might lose the sight of the eye and he would probably require surgery of some kind, but he couldn't guarantee the responsive results. So, the family decided to

leave that clip in the eye. So, when “red” reached the major leagues, he became a switch hitter. The reason he wanted to be a switch hitter, he always stood instead of having the usual batting stance with the two feet in the batter’s box, he would turn so his good eye would be facing the pitcher. Whether he was batting right handed or left. He was very successful, played for the Cardinals something like 14 to 16 years and wound up as coach and later manager. When he entered the hall of fame, I believe his average was something like 284, which is fantastic. Just a wonderful person.

Q: When you were over in Germany, were you aware of this MP unit involving any concentration camps or anything like that? Do you recall anything?

WS: My only recollection of that, I believe we were in the vicinity of Nordhausen at that time and I believe Nordhausen housed one of the so-called big six concentration camps. I believe some of our soldiers went and visited that camp. I did not.

Q: You stayed over there until after the war was over in the Army of occupation?

WS: I’m glad you asked me that. Shortly after the war ended in Europe, D-Day. Many of us were transferred to a camp and the camps at that time for the returning veterans were named after cigarettes. And the particular camp I was in was named 20 grand, and I was in this camp 20 grand for somewhere between ten days and two weeks and I had a pleasurable experience while there. While walking around the camp grounds one morning, I met a fellow by the name of Bill Smith from my hometown. Back in 1936, Bill had been about the number two tennis player on the tennis team. I was probably ranked five or six on that same team. It was a very playable meeting. A few days later, while still at 20 grand, I met another chap from my hometown of Stillwater, by the name of Herb Lee. Again, it was a very enjoyable and pleasant experience. The reason for the delay and keeping us at the cigarette camps, is the Army decided they would send back first the wounded men, and secondly those that had the longest period of service. I had only been overseas slightly over four months. So, when I came back to the states, I knew that my stay was going to be temporary. I was given a 30-day furlough and we were told that we were being assigned to the Pacific, the 7th corp would go to California and later probably participate in the Invasion of Japan. There’s an interesting episode about this to, that I’ll share with you the scuttlebutt I heard. When many of the more experienced and college education members of the 7th Corp. came back home for 30 days, they discovered that there was a Corps in California called a 36 Corp, who had never been overseas [phone ringing] so as a consequence, many of the more senior members of the 7th Corp

that had the education and the knowledge that was not mine at that time, I thought gee, this is unfair. The 7th Corp participated in the Italian campaign, the Invasion of Europe, and now they were expected to go over and invade Japan? And there's a Corp in the states with not any overseas service whatsoever? So, I did not participate in this program that was carried on, but many members of the 7th Corp sent telegrams and letters to people such as Walter Winchell, who had a Sunday evening radio broadcast at that time, to their various senators, members of congress, and suddenly as a result of that kind of pressure the 7th Corp on paper became the 36th Corp and the 36th Corp became the 7th Corp. So, our original 7th Corp never was headed to Japan after that.

Q: Do you recall where you were and what was your reaction to the death of President Roosevelt?

WS: I was in the Repel Dep camp when President Roosevelt died. I believe there's two things that happened within a week or ten days while I was in that camp. One was related to the death of President Roosevelt and the other related to the death of Ernie Pyle. Ernie Pyle meant so much to so many as Roosevelt meant to the people back here. But to the men in the service, particularly those in the infantry, and I suspect Marines, Ernie Pyle was just an outstanding individual and a hero. The soldiers were sad to lose these two giants within a matter of ten days.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

WS: I didn't have any decision-making power or anything of that kind, but from what I felt and what I knew then, I have the same feeling now. I think if I was in President Truman's shoes, I think I would have ordered the dropping of it. As devastating and terrible for the civilian losses that those two bombs caused. I think that Japanese were so fanatic that I believe some of the instruments that were made at the time prior to their dropping were realistic. When I read today and over the years since my discharge about what went on in the Pacific and Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and the devastating losses our Marines suffered, I just feel that the Japanese would have held out and American casualties would be huge. And I feel it's very unfortunate that certainly after the first bomb was dropped that there wasn't some surrender taking, so we wouldn't have had to drop the second.

Q: When were you discharged and where?

WS: I was discharged at Camp Callan, California. Which is a little camp just a

few miles from San Diego. I might share with you a little story on that one. Just prior to going to Camp Callan, I had been at another camp in California, the name escapes me at the moment, but when I was at this camp in California, one night at the PX I met a classmate of mine, Bill Hannahan, from Stillwater, NY. Bill was in the 104th I believe it was, division. They had fought heavily and they had been heavily involved in Europe. Bill and I had been close for several years, it was just a fantastic meeting. So, we set up a meeting the next night. There were two other men from Stillwater in Bill's 104th division, fellow by the name of Henry Hutton, and one of the video boys. Unfortunately, the next morning at 7:00am, I was transferred out and down to Camp Callan, so that hometown meeting with the other three never transpired.

Q: Did you make use of the GI bill when you returned home?

WS: I would like to go back to the previous question you asked just for a moment, when I was discharged in Camp Callan, I was given something like \$159 cash and issued the ruptured duck to return home. And it may seem strange to anyone listening now. Why would the Army pay a soldier in cash? Why not send them by troop train or something like that back home? On the weekend I was discharged, November 14th, 1945, one of our fleets, if my recollection is correct the 3rd fleet was coming in from the Pacific, and because they had been involved and had been in service for so long, all the railroad transportation, air transportation, bus transportation was commandeered by the service. So, when I was discharged and I wore this ruptured duck, I was classified as a civilian. But I believe I had the right then to wear the uniform for a month. So, a chap by the name of Stan Daily from Lock Haven, PA and myself decided we better hit the road, so we started hitchhiking home. I believe after about twenty rides, we finally met a man in Arizona who was coming back to Indianapolis Indiana and we took turns driving, staying overnight someplace in Oklahoma, Stillwater I believe, and we arrived back in Indianapolis maybe two days later. From there I took a train to Albany.

Q: How about the GI bill, did you make use of it?

WS: The GI bill.....The service awarded me with a wonderful opportunity. One to travel and see much of the United States. Secondly to meet people of all colors, all religions, educated and uneducated, and I discovered, boy, what a country. We really have to get along with each other, we need each other so much. I had great clerical skills, accounting skills. I knew nothing about military expertise. I might say I went overseas as an infantry replacement, and perhaps I should mention my infantry skills. I can't close one eye to sight a rifle. I went out on a

Sunday, I'm sorry, I went out during the week and I shot and scored something like 67 or 69, which is flunking. I believe the passing score is about 120. Well I went out on a Sunday and they didn't wave the red flag or Maggie's drawers, I was given a score of 192, which would make me an expert. I couldn't hit the target, but what was I going to say, what was I going to do. So, I went over without that great skill. I was very fortunate to survive and be made a typist clerk, instead of being sent up to the front line as a replacement. I met "Red" Schoendienst, Hall of famer, that was a great experience. I met a lot of fellows that were lawyers in civilian life and teachers in civilian life. So later, as a result of the GI bill, and the sacrifices of my dear wife, I was able to begin an education. I obtained a bachelor's degree and about 24 hours toward my master's degree on the GI bill. I finished it on my own contribution. I taught high school for 4 years after the arrival of our child, my wife had some health problems, couldn't care for them and had to return to work herself, so she sponsored my law school education. So, when I was 33 I went back to law school and obtained my law degree as a result of her many sacrifices. With the GI bill and meeting those lawyers and teachers in the service, gave me the opportunity to acquire an education and I feel very honored and privileged because of it.

Q: Did you join any Veteran's organizations?

WS: I have been a member of the Earl J. Manning American Legion Post No. 490 in Stillwater since about December of 1945. It's a wonderful post. We built a new building there back around 1946 or 1947. I've served there in various positions over the years. It's just been a very very pleasant experience. It's a social center. The Sons of the American Legion do a marvelous job there today, it's just a wonderful post.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that you served with?

WS: For a time, Yes. I might share another tale with you. When I was at Fort Ontario, which is in Oswego, NY, and then when I was in Pine Camp, which is now called Fort Drum, located just outside of Watertown, NY, I had a chap residing next to me, the next block, the next bed. His name was Willard Sauter. Willard was a conscientious objector, and on his service record, there was a stamp about three inches high, "conscientious objector." Willard had great skills, he could see something and paint it, and his painting would be the equivalent of a picture of a photograph, remarkable. We corresponded for a time, last I knew he was in Arizona. Just a remarkable person. He did such great work, that the chief, I don't know his title of our outfit called him in one day and said "Willard, we are so proud, we are so happy with the fantastic work you've done with us that I'm

willing to take that off and whatever.” Willard said “No, those are my feelings.” And I understand later he went overseas as a medic. Well he was just a fine conscientious individual with a conscientious objector, for I believe valid personal reasons for himself.

Q: Do you have anything else that you wanted to add?

WS: Yes, I have been privileged and honored to have served as master of ceremonies or to be guest speaker at many annual Memorial Day events in my hometown of Stillwater. I think I have probably addressed the Assembly's there 11 or 12 times over the years and I think that's a very small contribution, when I think of the sacrifices that others have made, the lives that were lost in the various wars we fought. If I can say something and remind people of their tremendous sacrifices and service, I considered a privilege and I've had that privilege many times and I'm very grateful for it.

Interviewers: Thank you Bill, Thank you very much.

WS: Thank you gentleman, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to share these stories with you.

[Shows a picture of William Sheehan in the service]

Q: Do you want to tell us about that?

WS: This picture is a picture that was taken I believe in either Black River or Watertown, NY. Probably in February or March of 1944. A friend of mine and myself noticed an advertisement in one of the camp's papers up there. I don't know what the special was but we could get a certain number of photographs and we wanted to get some and send it home, so we went to the studio and the photograph was taken by very young attractive photographer and it's easy to understand the spot. And I value it highly to this day.