

William Johnson (Jeff) Heath
Veteran

Wayne Clarke and Michael Russert
Interviewers

Home interview
Hammondsport, New York
November 7, 2005

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

WH: William J. Heath. October 17th, 1921.

Q: And where were you born?

WH: Corning.

Q: Corning, NY?

WH: New York.

Q: Corning, NY, ok. What was your educational background prior to entering service?

WH: I was in college, Hobart College. In Geneva.

Q: Did you complete your college or...

WH: Not until after the war.

Q: After the war, ok. Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

WH: Yeah, I was ready to join up. [laughs]. In fact, I called home and my father said to finish the semester out. So, I did.

Q: So, you wanted to join up before the war started even?

WH: Well, after Pearl Harbor.

Q: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

WH: In the fraternity house at Hobart College in Geneva.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard about this?

WH: Well, usual outrage and it sounded interesting, so I was ready to join up. Shortly after that before I...it was on a Sunday, as I recall. My dad says to finish up the semester. This is going to take a while. So, I did.

Q: So, you enlisted.

WH: Yes.

Q: Why did you select the Army?

WH: There had been talk about the Army having ski troops. I was an enthusiastic skier. The National Ski Association was recruiting. Encouraging people. Traveling around various campuses. I was on the ski team at school. It sounded like a nice fix. Being in the service but also doing what you like to do.

Q: When did you enlist?

WH: Must have been in the spring of 1942. Couldn't give you a date or anything.

Q: We don't need that. Where did you go for your basic training?

WH: Well, we had classification tests. I think I just finished a calculus course. So, apparently did pretty well on the math end of it. The army and all their wisdom figured that I would be a good candidate for engineers. Despite protesting, they sent me to Fort Belvoir in Virginia for engineering basic training.

Q: How long were you there?

WH: Until mid-summer of 1942.

Q: How did you end up in the 10th Mountain [Division]?

WH: When I joined up, I volunteered for it. Not much seemed to be happening and the National Ski Patrol was recruiting people for the mountain troops. The army had just developed a ski and mountain outfit for the army and despite that I still got sent to Fort Belvoir to be an engineer. [laughs] I can hardly put a thread on a screw, or the screw on the threads, I guess. So, that wasn't very practical, but the wisdom of the military... [laughs]. So, I ended up down in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. It didn't turn out to be too bad. We learned how to demolish things. Use explosives and that sort of thing. That was kind of fun.

Q: Did you do any bridge building? Or anything like that?

WH: Yes. We would build bridges one week and the next week we would blow them up.

Q: [unclear]

WH: That was kind of fun. [gesturing with hands] You learned to put a heavy charge here and a heavy charge here and light charges opposite. So, when you blew the bridge, it went up and turned sideways. It was more difficult to be repaired.

Q: I was just asked to ask you about one of the bridges you blew up.

WH: Yup.

Q: Do you want to tell that story?

WH: [laughs] This is a recollection, pure recollection. We had demolition exercises and training. They had a night project as the final phase of it. We would run a compass course

at night. We started out on the compass course. It was a combination exercise, I guess. We had a corporal who was leading our squad. We went off and he would take the compass with the sight on it. It was night, so a guy would hold up his luminous watch and would go up to him. He would go ahead and he would ask him again and repeat the thing. Except that he wasn't very sharp, at that time, early in the war, this was in the spring of 1942, we had these flat [unclear] type helmets. He would hold the compass up to look at it. This is what we knew from later on what had caused the whole mess. Apparently, the compass was not too steady with him holding it close to his helmet. We went off in the yard, repeating the thing. The corporal thought he knew where we were. Eventually, we came to a fence. We still had maybe several hundred yards more to go. The corporal that was running, the sergeant that was running the thing said we have to go a thousand two hundred yards or something like that, I don't remember. We better go over the fence because we were following the compass. We all went over the fence, some of us under. There was a highway and this was at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. It was a highway that went down to a little town called Accotink, I think. The nature of the thing. We came out a bridge when they figured the yardage and the [unclear]. The sergeant or the lieutenant that was running the operation said the yardage is right, the compass readings are right, we will have to assume that, this is the bridge. They sent guys out to each end of the bridge. Stopped traffic. It was a county road, like this road out here. Stopped traffic. We just finished the demolition course so we fixed our charges, a heavy charge here and a heavy charge here and two lighter charges. So that when we blew the bridge, it went up, turned and settled in the creek just as the book says. Gee, quite a crowd came around because we blew up a highway bridge. Next thing we knew there were State Troopers, County Sheriffs and MP's all up and down the road. We had traffic for great distances up and down the road. [laughs] After half an hour of confusion with people trying to figure out what had happened, the Army put us into the trucks and hauled us back to camp. All this time I had been down to Fort Belvoir, I kept writing letters and bugging headquarters about the mountain troops. I spend a whole month or two months trying to get out of here. I wasn't getting any response. I would go to company headquarters every day, all in all, bugging them. But, the next morning, I had my orders cut and a ticket to Fort Lewis, Washington. I ended up out at Fort Lewis, out near Seattle. At that time there wasn't any 10th Mountain, it was just the 87th Mountain Regiment. And that's how I got into the Mountain Troops.

Q: What kind of specialized training did you get out there?

WH: Specialized training was rock climbing and operating on skis at Mt. Rainier. We had...in fact the Army took over the lodge on Mt. Rainier. We had both the skiing and the climbing out at the same place.

Q: Were most of the recruits that were in your unit skiers?

WH: For the most part, yes.

Q: How long were you there?

WH: Well, let's see. I was at Fort Lewis the rest of that summer and fall. We did some training on Mt. Rainier. But in the meantime, the Army built Camp Hale in Colorado. Late in the fall, it was probably the end of October or early November, we went down to Camp Hale in Colorado. Pando.

Q: Did you also in between receive weapons training and so on?

WH: Yes. Uh-huh. Weapons, rifles, mortars and that sort of thing.

Q: What type of specialized winter gear did you wear?

WH: We had camo, white coveralls. They weren't coveralls but separate pants and capes. We already had rucksacks from training and ropes. We had already been learning climbing, use of pitons and that sort of thing and belay on Mt. Rainier. Down Colorado, by Thanksgiving they had good snow so we started training for winter conditions. At that time, we were all young and it was a lot of fun. It wasn't very military. Probably a good percentage of the people, in fact the platoon I was in we had people from Dartmouth and New England schools, mountain schools like Utah State, Pacific schools that were near the Sierras and the Cascades, Mt. Rainier, Hood and what have you. It was an ideal place to continue our training.

Q: How long were you in Colorado?

WH: Well, let's see. Went there, must have been October, I think of 1942. We were there until the spring of 1943. [nods head]. There was only one mountain regiment at that time, the 87th. From there, we went to Fort Ord and up to the Aleutians in the spring of 1943.

Q: When was the 10th Mountain created?

WH: We were still up in the Aleutians. I think the 10th was re-created because we didn't come back until much later. We got back and there were two new regiments besides our own 87th. The 85th and 86th were being created when we returned to the states.

Q: What were you doing up in the Aleutians? Was it just more training?

WH: Yes, more or less. Some of us got to go to Attu and everybody went to Kiska and that was in the summer of 1943.

Q: So, you were there engaging the Japanese at that time?

WH: On Attu, but by the time Kiska came around, the Japanese had pulled out of the Aleutians.

Q: Did you have much close contact against the Japanese?

WH: Yeah, with some.

Q: Could you describe that?

WH: Well, if you are familiar with the Aleutians or the climate, there all mainly muskeg, some rock, but everything is up and down. There is nothing growing out there.

And even shrubbery doesn't get as large as your little finger. I think all of the civilians that might have been there before the Japs came had been evacuated to Dutch Harbor back towards the Alaska mainland. We had the place mainly to ourselves.

Q: What kind of living conditions were there? Did you live in tents?

WH: Eventually, we had tents. We had to dig them in because the winds were very fierce. For each perimeter tent, we would dig out an area about as large as this room and put the tent in. To get out of the wind.

Q: Did you have stoves in the tent?

WH: Eventually. It tended to be rather soupy in there. Especially if you heated the tents. The muskeg would soften up and exude water. So, we would scavenge wood from wherever we could. There were very few rocks around. It was real muskeg country.

Q: What did you use for fuel in the stoves, just wood? That you could scavenge.

WH: Wood at first. And eventually they brought in charcoal and stuff. Because the winds were so fierce, I think about every week, somebody would lose a tent. Fire. To get out of the mud in the bottom, we would go down to the beach where they were unloading supplies and things and scavenge pallets and things. We had one kid who figured he would have something really solid, he brought up some things large than a pie pan about that thick [gestures about 4-6" thick with his fingers]. He was going to put each leg of his cot on it. And one of the guys said "Hey, what are you bringing the land mines in here for?". [laughs]. He was going to use those to float his cot. It was interesting.

Q: What was your food like? What kind of food did you have there?

WH: Canned.

Q: Canned food?

WH: Yup. I think at Thanksgiving, we did get turkeys maybe. At first it was the usual K-rations and that sort of thing for a month or two.

Q: How many lived in a tent?

WH: Oh, I guess in the pyramidal, you'd get about six guys in the tent, roughly. Some probably more, maybe a few less.

Q: How would you say your training prepared you for the conditions there?

WH: Training was pretty good, I thought. Although, along with the combat training, I think we should have had more survival training in arctic conditions. I think later probably they did adapt it.

Q: Did anybody suffer from frostbite or anything like that?

WH: Yes. Every once in a while, we would.

Q: Trench foot?

WH: Yes. Probably the reason for the trench foot was we had shoe packs. You know the leather tops, rubber. People's feet would perspire, they would take a break and of course the temperature would drop very cold and so they developed a lot of foot problems. Some of us were more lucky than others. Maybe we changed our socks more often. We always carried extra socks. It was good training. We got to climb a Kiska volcano. We did some fishing. The streams that went into the North Pacific had a lot of trout. We made spears to spear them. Nobody thought to bring rods and reels with them. We could make spears. We could take spikes and heat them, flatten them out and make sharp points on them and lash them to the end of a long stick. [gestures spearing] It worked pretty good to spear the fish. We would go in about knee deep in water and wait until the salmon came by and that was kind of fun. It made a good variation on food too.

Q: How long were you in the Aleutians?

WH: [looks up] Let's see, we went up in the spring, that would have been the fall of 1943. We came back to the states and went to Camp Hale in Colorado, which had been built in the meantime. All this is recollection.

Q: That's what we want. When you went back to Hale, were you used as instructors at all since you had had some experience?

WH: Yes. [nods]

Q: How long were you at Hale before you went overseas again?

WH: Hmmm. [looks up]

Q: Approximately?

WH: Until 1944.

Q: Where did you go?

WH: We went to Camp Carson in Colorado and Camp Swift in Texas and then to Italy.

Q: How did you go to Italy, by a troop ship?

WH: [Nods head]

Q: Did you go on convoy or a single ship?

Q: Do you recall?

WH: I think the Navy had the Atlantic pretty well under control. I think we had a couple destroyers that we would see every once in a while.

Q: When did you arrive in Italy? Approximately?

WH: Around Christmastime in 1944, I guess.

Q: Did you go right out into the field in operations?

WH: Very soon after we got there. By that time our regiment had been training new people. So, instead of one regiment, the 87th, the original, we had two other regiments, the 85th and the 86th.

Q: Did your equipment change much from when you were in the Aleutians to when you went to Italy?

WH: Nope.

Q: Basically, the same equipment.

WH: [Nods head]

Q: Could you tell us about your campaign in Italy?

WH: The old GI term was I guess “sneaking and peaking”

Q: What do you mean by that?

WH: Sneak up to and through the German lines, find out where they were and come back if you were lucky. We’d have a pretty good idea of what we were going to face when it was time to route them out.

Q: Did you do this in small teams of men?

WH: Yes. Small teams. Before we went to Italy, we had a lot of training on that sort of thing. Skiing and working with dogs, sled dogs and mules. Pack mules for carrying stuff up. In the Apennines, it’s much more mountainous than it is around here.

Q: Any problems with the pack animals, like mules and that?

WH: In the states, we had full size mules. We got to Italy and they were much smaller. They were...I guess they were a European breed. But they were still larger than ponies. But they were good for hauling stuff up the Apennines.

Q: Were they easy to control or did they have minds of their own?

WH: They were fairly easy to control, but they were kind of adverse same as we were, to artillery and that sort of thing.

Q: What kind of weapons did you carry?

WH: Most of the time, I carried a Carbine. It was pretty...the Army more or less insisted that everybody...different types of units would carry certain weapons. M1s or what have you. When we were in the Aleutians, we used mainly M1s and Thompsons. The Carbine was developed in the meantime. I liked the Carbine. It was accurate and it was light. It was for close stuff and that’s what we were doing.

Q: Did you have any trouble with it, with the weather conditions at all?

WH: No more than usual. I think snipers and some of those people used Enfields. Most of the people carried M1s. I liked the Carbine myself and that’s what I carried.

Q: You had sniping teams with you also?

WH: Yes. Any company you have is broken down to platoons and usually in each squad there would be one or two guys who would be snipers. Some guys would have other rapid fire.

Q: Were you involved in the actions with 10th Mountain throughout Italy?

WH: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about those?

WH: Apennines turned out to be pretty good mountains. So, we were able to utilize mountaineering experiences that we had. Some of the ridges were pretty steep and required rock climbing. A lot of scouting ahead of time to handle the country. 'Sneaking and Peaking' most of the...I guess you'd call it. I think the only thing we weren't prepared for was fighting in towns.

Q: Why did you find that so difficult?

WH: Well, we'd been training in the mountains of Colorado, out on Mt. Rainier, what have you. An example of what happened in town, I think I told Susan about it one time. On a rainy night, we were scouting out a town. It was raining pretty hard and it was raining harder all the time. I stepped into the doorway of a house on the street. I stood there a few minutes and I had a feeling there was somebody else there. Sure enough, in the doorway was another person and he said to me "hast du eine rauche", "do you have a smoke?". But it was a German. As soon as he said that, he realized. And I didn't answer him right away. All of a sudden, he went that way and I went this way. [gesturing] [laughing]. We had some odd experiences. Also, guys tended to carry wine in their canteens. A friend of mine on a patrol one day shooting pretty close to us, he says "I've been hit"! I said "where". He said "in the ass". I said "Is it bad?". He said "It's all over my fingers [gestures reaching to his backside], oh, it's wine. They hit my canteen". [laughs]

Q: Now you had a story about a German uniform.

WH: Yeah, I think [unclear] several German uniforms.

Q: Oh, and a motorcycle story.

WH: We were operating quite a way behind the lines at one time. The Germans were doing a lot of their traveling on motorcycles. Most of them had side cars. We thought, gee, that would be great. We ought to have some. We rigged up a rope across the road. One night when they went by, we pulled the rope up and dislodged the drivers. After a little practice, we got at least two motorcycles that we could use that weren't too crashed up after. But I understand that a lot of people did the same and I guess they did that to us too.

Q: You also had a story about dropping a charge down a chimney.

WH: Yes. That was at night. We were operating quite a bit behind the German lines in little town that was over towards the Yugoslavia border. We were getting pretty low on ammunition and supplies and we were going to have to pull out pretty soon, but we thought we would leave a really nice calling card. After observing the town for a couple nights and days, we realized that the German command was going into one particular house. These were all row houses in these villages. All stone mostly. I think we were down to one or two satchel charges. We thought, by watching and observing after several days, we realized we got the timing of the activity. So, we managed about dinner time, the one house seemed to be mostly staff officers going in and out. All the buildings were along the street and all connected. We got up on the roof, mostly tile roofs, and we were able to get over to the building that we wanted. About the time we figured that most of them had arrived for dinner, we dropped a satchel charge down the chimney. And that did a pretty good job. But it also got Germans rather riled up and gave us a hard time for a while. But we managed to get away.

Q: Were you involved probably, the most famous action of the 10th was the Riva Ridge where you there...

WH: Uh, huh.

Q: Could you give me your impressions of that action?

WH: Well, mine, it certainly wasn't heroic. We scouted the thing. It covered a whole area; it was a ridge. It was rather steep and I don't think the Germans felt that they would ever be attacked on the vertical side. After a careful three or four nights of scouting it, we went up the ridge. It did really end up surprising them and we were able to take the ridge. And that was the key to Mt. Belvedere that protected the flank of it...Mt. Belvedere controlled almost twenty miles of visibility and things in the...Other outfits had tried to take it and been beaten back several times. But, by having Riva Ridge, we could fire down on Belvedere which made the attack on Belvedere successful.

Q: You were with the OSS [Office of Strategic Services]. Were you with them in Europe?

WH: Yes, for a while.

Q: What did you do with the OSS?

WH: Spent time behind the German lines. My German was a lot more fluent then, then it is now. It was mainly locating German supplies, the routes in and out, getting information on what they had in the way of tanks that were a threat and that sort of thing. Mainly intelligence type thing. Also, working some with the resistance, Italian. They were over enthusiastic in a lot of the information that they gave us. [laughs] Well, part of it would be through misinterpretation with the languages. We had a few real bummers, but on the whole, it worked out.

Q: You were involved in Yugoslavia also?

WH: Uh, huh [nods]

Q: Was that with the OSS?

WH: Uh, huh. [nods]

Q: Could you talk about that a little bit please?

WH: At that time, in the war, the Germans were pulling out of the Balkans. The valleys ran primarily north and south. And all the transportation and railroads and roads ran primarily north and south. Because the weather was so miserable, the winter of 1944 – 1945, the Airforce wasn't too effective in disrupting. So, the thing to do was, when a train was pulling...the Germans were starting to pull out of southern Balkans. There were big yards where they were making up trains to haul out. And they weren't only hauling German troops, they were hauling everything that could be moved that the Germans were interested in. That was mainly a case of disrupting. Blowing bridges, Fort Belvoir again. Seemed like a big deal to us at that time, but on the effect of the whole war, I don't know effective it was. But it worked out pretty well, again we were blowing bridges and that sort of thing.

Q: Were you aware of the existence of concentration camps at all?

WH: Vaguely. Mainly from what we got from the Army newspapers.

Q: You delivered a message to Churchill?

WH: Churchill's son was running the resistance, the allied resistance there in Yugoslavia. He had a headquarters in a cave north east of the Italian, Swiss and Yugoslavia border. The Germans were running resistance groups and we had been dropped in to do the same thing. There was no coordination between the Brits and us. So, I got called up to meet with the commander of the British Operation and it turned out to be Churchill's son. Neither one of us was impressed with the other.

Q: You had a story about having to escape on a fishing boat.

WH: Yes, to get out of Yugoslavia. I got in alright but getting out was tough. We had to go down to the Adriatic Coast, steal a boat and go across the Adriatic back to Italy. The big problem was there was no fuel anywhere in Europe. Once we found a boat that we figured would make it, the next task was to steal enough fuel. We finally settle on one that had a lug type sail. We stole that and sailed across. But you had to land south of the German lines. But, without a good compass and what have you, it was strictly a crossed-finger operation. But it worked. We had a German patrol plane that came out one day, we were out of sight of land by a long shot, and circled and motioned for us to go back. We just threw a rope over the side and pretended we were fishing. He must have been low on fuel because he didn't stay over us for very long. To sail across that body of water, the Adriatic isn't a huge body of water, but you are out of sight of land. Compasses weren't too uh...I think we maybe had three compasses among us and all were off. None of them really agreed that much. We weren't familiar with the currents or the winds. But we were lucky, we lucked out and landed on the Italian coast south of the Germans.

Q: Were you in Italy until the end of the war? Italy? Yugoslavia?

WH: Yes. [nods]

Q: Where were you when the war ended? In Europe?

WH: Let's see. We crossed the pole. That's where Dole, I think, got his arm clobbered. He was in one of the regiments.

Q: Did you know him at all at the time?

WH: No. I didn't. I didn't know who he was until he got involved in politics. He was in 85th or 86th regiment, I don't know, in the 10th.

Q: How did you end up in the Pacific?

WH: That was after the Aleutians.

Q: Oh, it was after the Aleutians, in between. Oh, ok. We skipped that section then.

WH: The Owen Stanley Mountains are in New Guinea. They run about sixteen-thousand feet in elevation, some of them. And somebody got the bright idea that they ought to know more about what the Japs were doing and what the possibilities were. Running into trouble, they weren't picking up aerial photography or reconnaissance. So, the Owen Stanleys, they wanted some people in there to pick up information that could be used.

Q: Were you with the 10th Mountain at that time or the 87th?

WH: Well, the 87th...

Q: I know it was a regiment within. Was the 10th formed at that time?

WH: Yeah, the 10th was formed while we were in the Aleutians.

Q: Ok. So, how large of a contingent from the 10th Mountain went into New Guinea?

WH: There must have been...I think there were four or five ten-man units.

Q: Were you picked or did you volunteer for this?

WH: I volunteered.

Q: Now this is where you were wounded and captured for a short period of time? Could you tell us about that?

WH: Well, it was just a case of two patrols running into each other and both were equally surprised. And I was lucky to get out.

Q: You told your parents in a letter that you had the mumps. How did you...what was the background of that?

WH: Surprisingly on a patrol, I got hit in the face with the butt of a rifle. I spit out bone and teeth.

Q: So, in the hospital, you told your parents that you had the mumps.

WH: Yup.

Q: When did they eventually find out that you had been...

WH: Oh, I think, after the war.

Q: After the war. How long were you hospitalized?

WH: Weeks, I guess.

Q: What was it like to go from the Aleutians into New Guinea?

WH: Big change.

Q: I hoped they changed your uniforms. [laughs]

WH: Well, uniforms are pretty standard.

Q: You weren't wearing whites, I hope.

WH: [laughs] No. No. Uh, I don't know, uh, dog faces get pretty grubby.

Q: You won a Silver Star. Where did you receive that?

WH: Let's see, it was in Italy. [contemplation] Everybody that got an award generally deserved it. But, an awful lot of them, I think we all felt were they had a certain ratio of things they wanted to hand out.

Q: That was usually the Bronze Star. They didn't just hand out Silver Stars though.

WH: I was able to do...we ran a lot of patrols to break up oppositions to one of our offenses during the war. In Italy, I was able to guess right and bring in artillery and aerial support for an operation.

Q: Did you have any really close friends while you were there? In the 10th?

WH: Some very close friends.

Q: Have you maintained friendship with them, any of them?

WH: Yes. We are down to about less than half dozen now that are still alive.

Q: Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

WH: That was about the time we crossed the Po River in Italy.

Q: Did you have any particular feelings?

WH: You know, it doesn't sound very patriotic, but you had so many friends and others you saw blown apart or wounded that while it was sad, but it wasn't catastrophic as far as we were concerned.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the dropping of the Atomic Bombs, where you were at that time?

WH: Yes. I was on a troop ship on the way back to the states to be transferred to the Pacific.

Q: So, obviously, what were your feelings then?

WH: Great!

Q: When were you finally discharged?

WH: VJ day. In fact, I was on the DL&W [The Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad] on my way home to Corning and the train pulled into Scranton. Everybody around the depot were out passing beer around having a great celebration. We got off the train to see what was going on and they said that the war had been called off. That was great? I was on my way home from a leave expecting to go on to the Pacific. Which I never did.

Q: Did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

WH: Yes. I finished college with it.

Q: How about the 52-20 club; did you make use of that?

WH: Yes. It was a life saver in college. By then, my brothers and I, we all figured, heck, we couldn't live off my father any longer.

Q: Did your brothers go in the service also?

WH: Yes.

Q: How many brothers?

WH: I have two brothers. One brother went in besides me and he was in the Air Force. He flew B-26s and B-25s. In fact, I got to see him once during the war.

Q: Where?

WH: When I was in Italy, I got a rest leave out of the lines. I went down to a flying field south of Florence. I found out that they had a courier plane that flew daily or every other day to the same field that he was flying out of in Corsica. So, I went over and saw him. It was great. I got to fly a mission and that was fun.

Q: You said that you stayed in contact with many. Did you ever join, go to any reunions?

WH: I've been to a couple. I don't go...I haven't been to many lately. There are very few of the original guys that are left.

Q: Yes, yes.

WH: Age is catching up with us, I guess.

Q: Did you join any Veteran's Organizations?

WH: No.

Q: Never have?

WH: Nope. I went to, right after the war, back in Corning, some guys talked my brother and I into going to American Legion thing. And at that time everybody was talking about what the government owed. Bob and I figured, we got out alive, nobody owed us anything.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

WH: Oh, probably a great deal.

Q: In what ways?

WH: Well, time factor was. I went back to finish my degree. Met my wife when I went back. My life has been entirely different since then.

Q: You were a consultant to Fort Drum?

WH: I've been invited up there several times.

Q: In what capacity?

WH: For informal discussions of what we found worked and didn't work under various conditions. It was just informal things.

Q: [hands photograph to William] In this photograph, could you hold this up and tell us about that photograph, please?

WH: [looks at photograph and then shows to camera] Two of my very fine friends.

Q: Who are they?

WH: One is Andy Coletti, he's the guy on the left in the picture. And Dick Short, the guy with his shirt off. He was from Allentown, Pennsylvania. He's now dead.

Q: I heard Mr. Coletti just visited you recently?

WH: We get together several times a year.

Q: That's great. Are there any photographs you want to show us and talk about? You sent us a couple copies of those. Could you tell us about those? Is that you?

WH: Yes.

Q: Can you hold that up towards the camera, please.

WH: That was the first fall and winter...first winter at Mt. Rainier. [holds up 2 images]

Q: Is that you on the skis?

WH: I don't know. I think so, but I am not sure.

Q: Ok.

Q: Now, what is this?

WH: That is one of the camo jackets.

Q: You can lower the photo. I got it.

Q: Here, did you see this? [interviewer holds up white camo jacket]. I don't think we've ever seen one of these.

Q: Can you back up a little so I can get all of it in. Ok, that's good.

WH: We had different types earlier in the war. Those were something you could carry with you. We had complete photos here [holds up photo] of camos.

Q: Could you hold that photo sideways because it's kind of upside down.

WH: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q: That's all right. Ok. And that's the same type of outfit that Mike has there...

WH: No, these in here are the camo parka and pants, different than those.

Q: Got it.

Q: And these? [interviewer brings over a pair of skis]

WH: Those are a pair of GI skis.

Q: Were those skis that you used?

WH: Yes.

Q: Boy, they weigh a ton.

WH: But at that time...these have steel edges. And, I've been skiing since I was a kid, but I never had steel edge skis. These were the top of the line at that time.

Q: Could you ski really fast with those?

Q: And this? [holds up ax]

WH: That's an ice axe for climbing.

Q: Could you ski fast with those?

WH: It would depend on how steep the slope was. The reason they are dark, when we found out that we were going to be shipped out of Camp Hale, the weekend before, we went to Denver and we all bought paint remover. These had steel edged skis. They were top of the line back in those days. So, we bought paint remover and stain. Took the white paint off, these they were white. Took them to the railway express in Pando, Colorado, put our tags on and shipped them home.

Q: Ok. I'm going to stop the tape here. We got it.