

**Seeley McCombs Phillips
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**New York State Military Museum
Home interview, Richmondville, NY
June 15, 2005**

MR: This is a home interview in Richmondville, New York, 15th of June, 2005, approximately one PM. Interviewers are Wayne Clarke and Mike Russert. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

SMP: Seeley, S-E-E-L-E-Y, McCombs Phillips. Place of birth is Succasunna, New Jersey, August 18th, 1918.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

SMP: I graduated from high school in 1937 and from Delhi Ag [Agriculture] School [SUNY Delhi] in 1939.

MR: You went into service in July of 1941. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

SMP: I volunteered. That was what they called it in those days.

MR: Why did you decide to do that?

SMP: I have to go back to the last year I was in Delhi when I was studying under a man. I can't remember his name.

MP: [Mary Phillips, wife of veteran]: William [F.] Kennaugh.

SMP: Yeah, Bill Kennaugh. He had a radio going in his class, eight or nine o'clock in the morning, playing an election speech by Hitler. When the class got together and started, he said, you had better start watching for what's happening in Europe and Japan because they're going to change the history of the world one way or the other. And you fellows here in this class are going to be the ones that will be on the front lines for it, I think he put it. And I started following. I didn't really read the newspaper. But as soon as I got a

little money after I graduated, I subscribed to *Time Magazine* and started reading it. The more I read, the more uncertain I got about what our background is or was or could be. I really began to feel as though maybe what I should do is join the Army. I was DHI [Dairy Herd Improvement] testing at the time. I visited about twenty farmers a month. Always over the dinner table, [the discussion] turned to Europe and Japan. The more I watched it, the more nervous I became. I said, I think I'd like to volunteer. And I did. I said when I volunteered that I think my country needs me and a lot of others like me. I wanted to volunteer, get trained. From that statement, I was made a leader of...there were co-leaders. The head of the draft board's son was going in the same time I was, so we were co-leaders to take the group into wherever we were going.

MR: Why did you pick the Army?

SMP: Well, I was naïve. [laughs] They said that when you went into the Army, they classified you carefully and put you in a place where you ought to be. I was looking forward to that classification, wondering where I would get classified. I have some dirty cracks to say about it later.

WC: Where did you go for your basic training?

SMP: Well, we were sent from Middletown, New York someplace, Jersey City, Hoboken, I don't know where. We were taken over to Governors Island and given a physical exam. The morning of the 8th of July, facing the Statue of Liberty off Governors Island, we were sworn in the Army. Before lunchtime, we were sent back across the river to Fort Dix. I don't remember where we got issued uniforms or anything else. The second day I was there, I was on KP duty. I had to keep the fires going. I was awakened early in the morning, I don't know what time, but early in the morning. It seemed to me as though it wasn't that late because I was used to getting up early anyway. I put soft coal on the fires all day long in the kitchen. I began to look like some filthy coal worker in the coal business. I took a shower that night. I looked down at my feet and the suds were black. Two days later, the tent was filled with this big man, and it was Ernie Hyler [?]. His father was my music teacher back in 1932 when we lived in New Jersey. He came to see me because his parents heard I was there. He had some kind of an automobile. He got me out of ...he knew how to work the bureaucracy of the Army to get me out, and we toured Fort Dix.

MR: Where did you go for your basic training? Was it at Dix?

SMP: No, we were sent down to Camp Lee, Virginia, just outside of Petersburg to go through basic. It was Camp Lee then, it's Fort Lee now. We were all lined up and saw these men sitting at tables ahead of us. When we got there, it ended up that the first two

men out of a group of four were assigned to [the number] one and two barracks, and they were going to be technicians. The third one was going to be cooks and bakers. And the fourth one was going to be the motor pool. Well, I'm glad I didn't get in the motor pool. I would have been a complete failure there. I'm the world's worst mechanic. I hate to say it, but I did enjoy learning how to cook. I was also in a place that was in the medics, so that was how I was classified. I thought that was quite good propaganda on the part of the services telling you how you would be classified and put where you were the best for the Army.

MR: So, you were trained both as a cook, baker, and a medic, given all that training?

SMP: Well, we didn't get medical training. We learned how to march, salute and stand inspection. And told you to get a haircut.

MR: How long were you in basic in Camp Lee, approximately?

SMP: I will say right at the beginning, I have two dates that I'm certain of. in my whole career. One is the date in *The Complete Shakespeare* in Sydney, Australia, and one is the day that I was sworn in the Army. So I'm certain of July 8th, 1941. And any date that I give you after that until [the date of] *The Complete Shakespeare* is nothing but a guess.

MR: Okay. When you were at Camp Lee, were you there when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

SMP: Oh, I will get to Pearl Harbor. There is quite a little history before I get to Pearl Harbor. Because I was a country kid and naïve, to say the least. And I got in trouble because I said too much. First we learned how to march and do all the things that the Army has to have you do. And then, I think about six weeks, we started studying cooking. We had class in the morning. Two of us were assigned to the kitchen in, I think, A Company, the 4th Battalion. The other guy was from Hoboken, and he absolutely had no curiosity whatsoever. Our cook said, I will assign you to do things, and if you want any help, you have to ask me because I'm not going to interfere because this is the way I teach. The thing I always remember about the fellow from Hoboken, I can't remember his name, he was assigned to bake the beans. The first cook got the beans out that he needed on a Friday night. The fellow from Hoboken did nothing. The next morning, he poured the beans dry into the baking pan and did some other things to it. He said he was supposed to. The first cook never said a word. He started baking those beans [which were] not soaked. He said to me, what would you do, if you had to do it? I said, I don't think those beans would be fit for pigs. It would crack your teeth. So I was assigned to do certain things. I was the one that got the night meal because he never said a word to the fellow from Hoboken, never said a word at all. Until he let him figure out that he had

done something he shouldn't have done, baking beans. That was his method of teaching. I don't remember exactly some of the things he taught me. But I know I had to fry bacon once and I said to him, it's going to be a job to fry bacon for two hundred fifty men. He said, I'll show you how. He knew that I didn't know and was basically asking him. He showed me how to do it. It's come in handy quite a few times since. If the average female____

Tape skip

WC: Okay, go ahead.

SMP: He taught me, for instance, to take two pounds of bacon and put it in a frying pan and fry it with no problems at all. At the end of the basic, I was sent to Fort Adams, Rhode Island, in the Narragansett Harbor defenses, theoretically as a cook. For about two weeks, I worked as a wardman, and then they put me in the diet kitchen to handle the diet kitchen. This was sometime along September, October, I don't know when. This was an old established fort. They had a big stove and a dishwasher and a room beside it, which was the diet kitchen. I always remember the white tile floor because we had a dishwasher that leaked and the tile floor got dirty. The major came in just about noon, looked at the floor and said, stop everything. This floor has to be cleaned before you can serve any meals. So we always had to mop the floor at noon. Of course, with the water on the floor of white tile, that floor looked about like a hog pen. About the middle of October, the order came out from the War Department, all harbor defenses in the East and West Coasts Including Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, and the Philippine Islands were on twenty-four hour alert. In other words, not more than ten percent of the men could be off duty at any one time. In other words, every day you were on duty when you were sleeping, when you were awake, or anything else. Our command said if you want to leave the post, you can leave it. You applied at seven o'clock in the morning for a pass to leave the post. I was on duty at seven o'clock in the morning, so I went and saw the first sergeant and said, I'd like to leave the post. He said come in at seven o'clock in the morning. I said, I can't, I'm on duty. [He said] Well, that's your tough luck. So essentially, I was confined to the hospital area. If I wanted to go off and get a haircut or go to the PX, I couldn't because I hadn't applied for it at seven o'clock in the morning. I figured out that I could get to the PX and get a haircut and a few other things if I just snuck off and did it. As long as I didn't leave camp, I was alright. I think he knew about it, but he didn't do anything.

On Christmas Eve, I was on guard duty at three o'clock in the morning. They handed me a loaded pistol. I started hunting for the first sergeant. I was wandering all around the

camp looking for the first sergeant but didn't find him. I was not arrested but held. When Captain Gunn found out why I was looking for him, he told the first sergeant to arrange for me to have a pass so I could leave camp. I didn't want it on Christmas Day and I didn't want it between that and New Year's. When I went in to see him, I said, I'd like to have a pass. And he said, you didn't come at seven o'clock in the morning. I said, the captain said if I came in and applied for one, you were to give me one. He said he didn't tell me that. Although he'd been standing right there when he said it. I got kind of annoyed, so I grabbed him by the shirt front and pulled him to his feet and threw him through a window. About the time he hit the ground outside, I found myself being arranged in a straitjacket, ending up in front of the commanding major. I told the major, just let me out, I'll kill him. I told him that his inheritance wasn't too good. The major asked me what my problem was. I told him and he didn't say anything. But that afternoon, I was transferred from Fort Adams to Fort Getty, the hospital outside the fort. It's on the other side of the Narragansett Harbor defenses on the west side. It was out in the country. You didn't have to get a leave. You just walked out and you were out in the country. There was no place to go, but I could go anytime I wanted to.

This was great service, however. There were four nurses, three nurses and a head nurse. I think one or two medical officers. There were no administrative officers. Fort Getty was small, not many men. That was the third one. It was Fort Adams, Fort Wetherill was in the center of the defenses, and Wetherill was on the west.

MR: This is December, correct, of 1941?

SMP: Yes.

MR: What happened? Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Which of the forts, Adams or Getty?

SMP: I was cooking on a Sunday afternoon in Fort Adams, and somebody walked through the door and said, Pearl Harbor has been attacked. I don't think that very many places had ever heard of Pearl Harbor. But because we were part of the coastal defenses and the defense of Hawaii and the Philippines, I had heard of Pearl Harbor. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, as I recall, when somebody came through the door and said, Pearl Harbor has been attacked. We weren't allowed to have a radio in the kitchen. A group of us got together. I don't know just how it happened. We talked about it and they said this probably means war. If it means war, we are going to be in the middle of it. Which we were.

MR: When you left Getty, where did you go from there?

SMP: Well, I have to finish telling you about Getty because it was interesting. Four nurses. I hardly did any cooking. The nurses came down and wanted to cook and keep their hands in. So I really enjoyed my time at Getty because I was the only cook. I was the mess sergeant. I was everything. Then I was called back to Fort Adams sometime in the wintertime and was assigned by Captain Gunn [?]. He had been transferred. His wife just had a child. I was to help his wife and pack up his stuff because he was being transferred. I did a little cooking for him and once in a while babysat. But mostly packed up his stuff so he could be moved. The day that I shipped out all of his stuff, everything left in good shape, and the house that he had was inspected. I returned back into the barracks where I was staying to see my name on the bulletin board. I was being transferred. The next day, I left for Camp Edwards in Massachusetts and reported to the 2nd Station Hospital. I must have been early. We had no officers to report to. There was just a group of men. They weren't to be in the second station hospital. They were just putting the hospital group together. About the first day I was there, I found out that we were headed overseas. They didn't know exactly where, but they thought Australia. I immediately wrote home and said that if you want to see me before I leave for overseas, you better come over and see me now because I'm going to be gone. My folks came over and stayed I think two nights. I don't remember whether I am right or not, that I had had a three-day pass once we came out of Camp Lee. But I am not certain of it. But I know that I saw my folks and that was the only time that I saw them until I came back in 1944.

MR: When did this unit ship to Australia?

SMP: Well, I don't know that.

MR: Okay. So you did go to Australia with the unit?

SMP: Yes. We took a train. We were loaded on the train and were sent west. Nobody told us officially where we were going, except that we were going west. I was one of the cooks that was supposed to cook for the crew. We didn't have a dining car on the troop train. We cooked in a____

MP: Baggage car.

SMP: Well, it was sort of a freight car. Because it just so happened, I had been promoted to a T4 by Captain Gunn. I was also the first cook going west. I was allowed to get off the train if we needed it. Somewhere, I do not know whether it was in Utah or Nevada, we had a few officers with us.

MR: When you reached the Pacific Coast, how did you get to Australia?

SMP: Well, we ended up in the Cow Palace [Arena and Event Center]. I don't know how long we were there, I think a couple of weeks. We were told that we were going to travel to Australia in a convoy, and I was assigned to cook going over wherever we were going. Got on this ship, the USS West Point. No sailor told you anything except that we were going. I was on the ship a couple of days before the rest of the hospital group came aboard. I don't believe that I really knew who was in my unit and who wasn't. At ten thirty at night, and I remember the time very much, we started out of San Francisco Harbor with nobody with us. Getting out in the Pacific Ocean from the San Francisco Harbor was a lot of fun because I think the exit is kind of crooked and I was intrigued. I stayed up on deck and watched us go through the various lights and so on that were banging and flashing. The next thing we knew, we were out in the ocean, happy as clams, except that one day they said we just crossed the equator. I think it was the next day when they rang the general quarters. We had already had this. The ship made a sharp turn, more sharp than usual, and you felt them kick in the engines and pick up speed. I think it kicked in eight engines. Boy, we were traveling, zigzagging. An announcement that we had seen an unidentified ship they thought was a Japanese cruiser and they were leaving it. At the same time, they gave us a notice that we were supposed to have gone to Sydney, Australia. But Sydney, Australia had been attacked by Japanese midget submarines and our destination had been changed. About thirty six hours later, we were in the capital of New Zealand taking on fuel. We left at night again about ten thirty and started across the Tasman Sea, and landed in Melbourne, Australia. They were not prepared for us. We had a whole shipload, probably twenty thousand men aboard, and we were landing. Our group did not draw trucks early on. We were unloaded. Orders were no talking, no smoking, we carried our packs in the rain, and marched through Melbourne. As I remember, it was dark, blacked out. People along the street said, good to see you, Yank, Hi, Yank. Good to see you. Next thing we knew, we were picked up, taken up next to the zoo in Melbourne with our tents on the ground. We had to raise them. It was still raining and about probably forty degrees. We were in woolens. For the next week, I always said that was the coldest I've ever been in my life because there was no place to get warm. It was sort of wet fog, that is all I can say, about forty degree temperature. If you got in bed, you were covered up with a woolen blanket which was always wet. I figured out how to hang my clothes on the tent pole. We ate outdoors, and all of us complained about being cold.

MR: Approximately how large was your unit, the 2nd Hospital Station?

SMP: I think one hundred fifty men.

MR: Did you have nurses with you and doctors?

SMP: We hadn't yet met our officers except for the some that had come with us. I don't know when we picked the officers up, actually. I discovered we had more with us than I thought we did when we started north. Because I really think that we were maybe the first, or maybe the early ones going north. Because several times at mealtime we were met by some important people that spoke to us. We were given our meal on white tablecloths. I was quite impressed. They were happy to see us. Every time we moved, they told us, oh, it's wonderful to see you, Yank. Good to see you, and so on. Australia was scared. Australia was frightened. You really knew that by the way the people treated you. When you were moving around Australia, every state had its own railroad gauge. So, when we went from Victoria to New South Wales, you had to change trains and change everything because the railroad changed. It didn't take us long to get away from this damp, cold weather to warm up. Then we got the first word. I don't remember exactly how, but it came through. There were lots of rabbits in Australia, in the southern part of Australia, and we heard the stories about rabbits. And the next thing we knew was we were up in a place called Brisbane, which was where we changed trains again. The rumor floated around in the train that this was the last change of trains we'd have. It didn't change from that north. It was getting quite warm and dry, and we were quite comfortable. We traveled all night. I think maybe two nights, but I don't remember. I know that however long it was, we came to a place where we started climbing. And I was out on the observation deck of the train, and I got wet because we were next to a falls. Although I can't believe I got wet when I went back and saw it later when I wasn't in the service. But this falls was next to the train. We kept climbing and climbing. We stopped and they said we were at the top and then we went farther. We were in Mareeba, Australia.

MR: How long were you in Australia?

SMP: At this point?

MR: Total.

SMP: I really can't tell you, except...because I put in time in New Guinea. I think from [ponders]...we had gotten overseas. We landed on the 4th of June. I stayed in Australia for training. So somewhere in____

MP: December?

SMP: December of 1942.

MR: The hospital unit you were with.

SMP: I was with the 2nd Station.

MR: Right. You were a cook for the unit? Or did you do any other duties?

SMP: For some reason or other, and I can't explain it to you, I was chosen to do other jobs. We had not been in Mareeba long. Incidentally, we were still wearing woolens. And Mareeba temperature in the daytime probably got to one hundred ten [degrees]. Our commanding officer ordered us to dig slit trenches in ground that was about as hard as a rock. Our first night there, we were welcomed by an air raid. We were in the combat zone. I was sent back to get the material that we hadn't been able to bring with us. I was given a railroad pass and sent back. I ended up several days later in the colonel's office and he said, you had no written orders. I said, no, they just told me to go back and get it. Every time we were in the combat zone, the first thing they gathered us together and read the Articles of War to us. The Articles of War always ended up the same way. It was punishable by death or such other punishment that a court-martial directed. We who were enlisted men had an eleventh one. And the 11th one said, walk my post in a military manner. I'll take no shit from the company commander. That was the eleventh Article of War.

MR: In December of 1942, you left Australia. Where did you go from there?

SMP: Oh, well, it is a long story again. I am sorry, but it is a long story because not only was I sent back for equipment and material, but I got into a colonel's office and he explained to me that I had to have written orders to do what I was doing. They hadn't given me any. [He said] take my stuff and go back to the second station hospital. So I did. And one officer said, you didn't get everything. I said, I need written orders. He said, I'm ordering you to go back and get this equipment. [I said] You can't give me that order. It's an illegal order. And let me tell you, I know what a man is like when you tell him it's an illegal order. He got red in the face and began to shout that if I was ordered to do something, I was to do it. I said, you can't give me an illegal order because I could be taken out and shot for obeying your order.

MP: The essence of it was, he got in trouble, so then they put him in the 7th Portable.

MR: Okay, so your wife said you were transferred to the 7th Portable?

SMP: Yes.

MR: What's the difference? What's a portable surgical hospital as opposed to a station hospital?

SMP: We were supposed to have twenty five men and four officers. We actually only had twenty one men and four officers. We were sent to Cooktown. That was another great trip because I think it was the most interesting part of the trip. We went through the breeding

blue whale herd. The male blue whales weigh about one hundred fifty tons and the females weigh about one hundred tons. It made it quite interesting because they flipped water at the ship as big as an oil barrel probably. The captain warned us. [He said] duck those drops of water because they will kill you. We got to Cooktown, which is as far north as you could go in Australia. While we were there, the Battle of Milne Bay took place. That was really celebrated by the Aussies. This group had been in the Middle East. They had never won a battle. They were driven out of Greece and Crete, Persia, and so on in the Middle East. They won. They beat the Japs in Milne Bay. I think it was the first defeat that the Japanese Army had had in several years.

MR: How was your hospital unit? Was that connected to that battle in any way?

SMP: No, I think we were serving the Australian Army.

MR: So, you were a surgical unit serving with the Australian Army?

SMP: But I never saw the Australian Army. We were sitting there. We had an interesting experience there. We had a man who brought in a child who had been bitten by a death adder, which is a very poisonous snake. It was a father and a mother and a son. It turned out that the father was born in the Indian Ocean. He had never seen ice, and didn't know what cold water was. I was a cook. I gave him a glass of iced tea. He fished a piece of ice out of the tea, held it up and looked through the sun and marveled over it. He said, it's quite cold, it tastes very nice. And he put it back in the water. But that was the first time he ever had a glass of ice water in his life.

MR: When did you end up in New Guinea?

SMP: We had to go back to Townsville. What's the name of that? [directs question to his wife, Mary]

MP: Brisbane?

SMP: No, we went to____

MP: Port Moresby? Woodstock?

SMP: We went for training in Woodstock, on the Sandy [Sandon?] River. We weren't far from Ayr, which is south of Townsville.

MP: Go on to New Guinea.

SMP: No, I'm going to tell him this. It was pouring in Ayr and it was our first time that we had seen a____

MP: Monsoon.

SMP: The monsoons. We trained on the Sandy [Sandon?] River. When we got back to camp, just about an hour after it started. We heard the river and the bridge next to our camp was underwater. We trained in Woodstock until we were ordered to leave, and got on a ship in harbor in Townsville. And we were given some kind of Army rations. I ate them and threw them up several times. I told my commanding officer what was happening to me and he said, well, you just have to get used to them. But I couldn't get used to them. As fast as I ate them, I threw them up. We started south and went to Brisbane. And in Brisbane, we loaded, I don't know, a shipload of men and fifteen thousand tons of ammunition. We were headed north. We came out of Brisbane and found ourselves in a convoy with several destroyers and went across the Coral Sea. The Coral Sea looked as though somebody had poured oil on it. Not a ripple, not a thing. We had a trailer mounted on the number one hatch and tied down with all kinds of ropes. This was a Dutch ship with a Javanese [Indonesian] crew. We saw them. They talked to each other, and we didn't understand a word they said, of course. They tied down this trailer on a number one hatch so that you couldn't put your hand between the ties. It was almost a solid rope. We didn't know exactly why, but we found out in a short period of time when we were running into a blow on the Coral Sea. We were on radio black out. We could tell that because the lights were flashing on various ships. [We] talked back and forth and talked to the destroyers. It was really something. At that point, I was in the superstructure taking care of a patient. I didn't really know how I got to that point, but there I was. I had the pleasure of being able to look out and see waves coming at you and high enough to scare you to death. The ship buried its nose in a wave and the propeller ran free and then it shuddered and hit the water and the nose came out. When the blow was over, the trailer on the number one hatch with all the rope on it had been moved. So that shows you some of the power that was there. The guys in the Navy claimed that sometimes the destroyers shipped water down their stack. A couple of days later we landed in Port Moresby. It was quite calm and quite boiling hot. I still remember how hot it was.

MR: Even though you basically were trained as a cook, you were doing hospital duties also?

SMP: Yes.

MR: You were taking care of patients and so on?

SMP: Yes.

MR: How long were you in New Guinea?

SMP: Well, I don't really know, but I think six months or more.

MR: Basically, you were a surgical unit. They provided, I guess, surgical operations and so on for those that were wounded?

SMP: It was a portable surgical hospital. We picked it up and carried it. They recommended that any man going into combat in New Guinea carry forty pounds, maximum. Going into Santa Ana, [unclear] 59.18 I carried one hundred three pounds. While we were there, I think the natives built us two shacks, whatever you want to call them. Because we had lots of kunai grass and it didn't take them long, about 1 day, and they had one up. Sometime during the time that we were in Port Moresby, we had to go over the Owen Stanleys. And the way you got over the Owen Stanleys was you flew. So we went in a converted Douglas bomber. We were ordered when we were in Port Moresby...when we stopped in Dobodora [Airfield Complex], you had ten seconds to get off the plane. We had the pleasure of being accompanied over by a couple of Japanese fighters. We were flying right at treetop level, so we weren't touched. But when you talk about getting off a plane in ten seconds, I think we did it in five, mostly because we were scared to death.

MR: In your hospital unit, in addition to doing some operations there, what other kinds of diseases and so on did they treat?

SMP: We had all the jungle diseases, skin diseases, because you only had to go down about an inch and you had water. The men fighting were in water. We had malaria, dengue fever. We had another disease called tsutsugamushi fever. I'm not exactly certain what that was. We usually just evacuated them. But we had men with skin diseases, crotch [jock itch], [jungle] ears [unclear] 1.02.31, and so on.

MR: Probably feet from being immersed in water all the time.

SMP: Being in water all the time. And they didn't heal up when you got them out. I don't think we could dry them out enough to really get them healed up. Some of the men went so far as to write home and have their parents send them one of their favorite skin treatments. They thought it was better. I got some of that. I had it for twenty years after I came out of the service.

MR: Now, with nutrition and diet, what kind of foods did you have? Were you constantly supplied, and did you have fresh fruits and foods and so on?

SMP: We had Argentine canned beef and hardtack [cracker]. We were lucky if it didn't have any weevils in it. We were perfectly happy if it didn't. As long as you were eating weevily biscuits in the dark, it didn't bother you. But once you got daylight, it kind of did.

They also had coffee, which was made in cast iron pots, a nice green-colored coffee that didn't taste bad in the dark, but it kind of turned you off in the daylight.

MR: Did you have fresh fruits and vegetables at all?

SMP: That's a joke. [laughs]

MR: Okay. Well, I'm asking.

SMP: I ended up back in the kitchen for a while because the guy that became the cook got sick. I asked the natives if we could find anything and they took me out and showed me some bamboo that was growing, which didn't taste bad, actually. I boiled it up and it tasted pretty good. We also found a few early palms that grew, and if you cut them down, you got a heart of palm, which tasted pretty good, but it wouldn't take long to eat it all up. That was the only thing we ever had. When Oro Bay opened up, they brought a ship in. The first thing that came into us was a load of onions, and the fellows all started stealing the onions. They did not take too much care about peeling them; they ate onions like apples.

MR: How long were you in the Pacific?

SMP: Well, I came home in 1944 on rotation. I did a lot of things after the portable hospital. The one thing we did was kind of interesting. When we got to Papua, it was a malaria country, we had to take quinine. Quinine has a terrible bitter flavor. You walked up and an officer popped a quinine pill in your mouth and you were expected to swallow it. I can take pills today and drive everybody crazy because all I do is just put them in my mouth and swallow them. Incidentally, I had malaria and dengue fever. I was about the last one in my organization to get Malaria, although I worked right in the middle of it. A group came. One man in particular said there was no reason why any of us, who were behind the lines not standing in water facing the Japanese, should get malaria. He very carefully undressed under a mosquito net and he did everything. It takes twelve days after you get bitten to get it. He was there fourteen days before he got malaria. [Even] with all he did to keep from getting it.

WC: What about dengue fever? What effect did that have on you? What, what does that do to you?

SMP Another name for that is breakbone fever. My captain, Fred Silverman, said, with dengue fever, the first day you were afraid you're going to die, and the second day you're afraid you aren't. Every joint absolutely hurts. It is so painful. I gave many men morphine just to take away some of the pain. These were strong men that laid there and cried just like a baby. It is absolutely terribly painful.

WC: What causes that? Is that from a mosquito bite or from the water?

SMP: It was a mosquito born.

MR: After you were in the 7th Portable, you were transferred to another unit. What was that? The 84th Station Hospital?

SMP: Yes.

MR: That was back in Australia. What did you do there?

SMP: Well, the first thing was, while we were up there at the 7th Portable, I was also called up to go to OCS. I had applied for OCS in Fort Adams, and they told me, with I think a great deal of pleasure, that I couldn't go because I was in combat. I could not go. We stayed there for something like, I think, six or seven months. Flown back across to Port Moresby, then on a ship, we went to Brisbane. We unloaded with the infantry and stayed there for a period of time. I don't know how long.

MR: When you were with the 84th, how long were you with them?

SMP: I hadn't gotten the 84th yet. We went north to Townsville. In Townsville, I got another attack of malaria, and was put in a hospital behind a bunch of buildings. This woman was touring the place and she looked out the window and wanted to see. She was curious. So she came down and I was having a chill and hadn't had anybody look at me. I was in kind of rough shape. This woman sat down and started talking to me, and it turned out to be Eleanor Roosevelt. She said to me, and I think this is the right quotation, "I am certain that I will tell Franklin about this." I got care after that. While I was there in the hospital, they transferred me to the 84th Station Hospital. Why, I know not. I never was able to make contact with any of the men in the 7th Portable, and I ended up in the 84th Station Hospital.

MR: So, basically, you were stationed in Australia again, just like you were with the 2nd?

SMP: Yes.

MR: How long were you in Australia with the 84th?

SMP: Again, I don't know.

MR: When did you end up leaving Australia?

SMP: Again, I don't know. We left Australia for Brisbane. How long we were there and so on, I can't tell you.

MR: Do you remember when you returned to the States?

SMP: Oh, yes, very much so. We made the beachhead in Sansapor. I think, a week or ten days after that, the officers came around, or one of them came around, and said, you're going back, you're going home on rotation. I never heard of rotation, but I was perfectly willing to go and was flown back to Hollandia. I found myself in the camp. We were working. These men were veterans and they had things for us to do. I can only tell you about the time because when we got to Hollandia, I voted in the presidential election. So, it must have been sometime in October, I think.

MR: When did you arrive back in the States then? Shortly after that?

SMP: We stayed there quite a while because they had invaded Leyte, the Philippine Islands. We got back sometime when it was cold.

MP: December?

SMP: November sometime. One of the experiences we had in Hollandia, I was assigned [when I] came back. Well, two things happened. The last day, I was working in a hospital to pass the time away. I came in at night, and the whole camp was jumping. They said, your name is on the board. So I went into headquarters and the officer looked at me and said, I will read these to you in order. The first thing is, you have been accepted for Officer Candidate School. I looked at him and I said, I applied in January of 1942, and look at how long I've been, and now they finally accepted me. And I wouldn't want to tell you exactly what I told him, but I told him I was headed home to the States and I'd be damned if I was going to go to Officer Candidate School. They had all that time to get me. So that's why I ended up as a sergeant. The second one was that if I did go back, I was to cook for three tuberculosis cases. I wouldn't have anything to do with them. I was just to cook for them and stay in the hole and so on. So that was what I did going back.

MR: Where were you assigned in the States, or were you discharged?

SMP: I came back to the States and it took us a long time to get across the States. I was assigned to Camp Upton, but first I went____

MP: home on leave.

SMP: Well, I came home on leave.

MP: Lake Placid Club.

SMP: Yeah, I reported to the Lake Placid Club. I can't ever forget because there was a time in Hollandia when I took care of men that had passed out from the heat. It was one hundred forty degrees on the deck. It was cooler in the hold. I don't know what the

temperature was where I was, but it was hot. When I walked across the porch of this Lake Placid Club, it was thirty below zero.

MR: What did you do at Camp Upton?

SMP: First of all, I ran a barracks. Camp Upton then was accepting men that had cracked up, and they were treating them. First of all, I was assigned to a barracks and had to see that the men were taken care of. Then they stopped doing it and just discharged them. I was assigned to an office where my job was to register in a file card, everybody that came in, everybody that came out and everybody that was on furlough. Because I was in the detachment of patients, I also had to answer the phone for any business except for what the lieutenant, who was in charge of the office, received. So I was to know who was AWOL and where they were and quite a lot of monkey business like that.

MR: When were you discharged?

SMP: I was home on furlough and got malaria and was in the Air Force Stewart Field Hospital. V-J Day came and they discharged me that day. When I got back to camp, my name had come up for discharge, but I had to wait for a couple of days for it to come up again. So I was discharged on Labor Day____

MP: The third 3rd of September.

MR: When you got home, did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

SMP: [laughs] As much as I could.

MR: Did you ever use the 52-20 club?

SMP: When I came home, I applied for Cornell [University]. I wanted to get in. I made up my mind way back that I wanted to study to be a veterinarian. I was discharged with a ten percent disability from malaria, dengue fever, and a lot of other things. I applied for Cornell pre-vet and got accepted. And discovered after I arrived on campus that I was eligible for [Public] Law 16, which [as a result of] the disability, gave you more money. And they had certain other requirements. I got into veterinary college, graduated, got married in the meantime, and the rest of it has been history.

MR: Did you join any veterans organizations?

SMP: No.

MR: Never did?

SMP: No.

MR: All right, well, thank you very much for your interview.