

**Joseph H. Golden  
Veteran**

**Wayne Clark  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on February 23rd, 2010  
Whitehall New York**

**Q:** Okay, today is the 23rd of February 2010. We are at the Isaac Griswold Public Library in Whitehall, New York. My name is Wayne Clark, and with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

**JG:** Joseph Henry Golden, Senior. Born July 24, 1921, Whitehall, New York.

**Q:** Did you attend school in Whitehall?

**JG:** I graduated high school in 1939.

**Q:** And at that point, did you go to work, or did you go into the military? Another—oh, you went to work for the railroad.

**JG:** I was a brakeman on a railroad. I got married in 1942.

**Q:** All right, let me go back a little bit. What was life like here in Whitehall before the war started, back after you graduated from high school?

**JG:** It was pretty active, a lot more depth than there is now, because there were a lot more stores and left Lindenhurst... or inherited a tunnel... they got that done over there in 1921, the railroad thing... wonderful, creative in that time.

**Q:** Was there a lot of people employed by the railroad?

**JG:** A few, that was about the main thing... and the signal, oh, you had that big, is that Citgo over here...

**Q:** Now, what railroad did you work for?

**JG:** The Delaware and Hudson.

**Q:** Did you go through any kind of on-the-job training program to be a brakeman?

**JG:** No, that was alive when I went with my father... he was with what he called... not pregnant either... the neighborhood, and he was a foreman on the track... my older brother was a brakeman, and he got out for mental... some pieces... you know, they just quit or something.

**Q:** Mm-hmm. Were you working on the railroad when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941?

**JG:** No, I didn't go to reserve... but, well, I was working on the railroad at that point.

**Q:** And how did you end up going into the service? Did you enlist, or were you drafted?

**JG:** I was drafted... the old building, there... we all went up there. A lot of us were drafted.

**Q:** Do you remember when you were drafted?

**JG:** No, but it was close to my birthday... maybe around September-October 1942... I got married, had kids already, and went in then.

**Q:** Any children at that point?

**JG:** No.

**Q:** And when you were drafted, whereabouts did they send you for your basic training?

**JG:** They go get buttoned down New York.

**Q:** Mm-hmm. They're closed in New Mexico for your basic training?

**JG:** Clovis, New Mexico. Away from there, but we went to all of the different groups when the replaces.

**Q:** So, for your basic training down in New Mexico, were you being trained for the infantry or railroad?

**JG:** Railroad.

**Q:** Okay, because of your railroad background?

**JG:** Engineer, what would the goal engineer size... of the engineers with the 13th Operative Battalion.

**Q:** After your basic in Clovis, did they send you to another base in the States?

**JG:** Oh yeah, we went to someplace... what do they call it, that departure place in New Jersey?

**Q:** Camp Dix?

**JG:** That's right, Camp Dix.

**Q:** And you were sent overseas. Do you recall the approximate date you were sent overseas? Was it still '42 or later?

**JG:** Around early '43, I think.

**Q:** And did you go overseas by ship?

**JG:** Yeah.

**Q:** Did you go in a convoy or a single ship?

**JG:** It was a convoy, not a big convoy.

**Q:** Did you get seasick at all on the ship?

**JG:** No, I was lucky. Others did, but I never got seasick.

**Q:** How was the food aboard the ship?

**JG:** It was decent, but you didn't sleep too much; we had a guard a lot.

**Q:** So, about halfway over, you encountered some submarine rumors?

**JG:** Yeah, we heard about submarines while going across.

**Q:** When you landed, was it in Casablanca?

**JG:** Yes, we landed in Casablanca.

**Q:** You didn't go to France or Germany right away?

**JG:** No, we didn't. Stayed in Casablanca.

**Q:** What was Casablanca like? Was it hot there?

**JG:** Oh, hot... and green, lots of green.

**Q:** How much time did you spend in Casablanca?

**JG:** Oh, maybe a couple of months.

**Q:** Were you sleeping in tents?

**JG:** Yes, in pup tents. Wake up in the morning with a little dabble of water in the pit.

**Q:** Now, were you with the railroad company at that point?

**JG:** Yes, I was assigned as a trained crewman.

**Q:** And how many men were in your unit?

**JG:** About 42 in the operating battalion.

**Q:** What type of railroad was it? Narrow gauge or standard?

**JG:** They were narrow, like pushcart-sized. Not big trains, with cupolas on the outside.

**Q:** Were they American trains?

**JG:** No, they were French. Looked different from ours.

**Q:** Were they powered by steam or diesel?

**JG:** Steam, using coal for fuel.

**Q:** Did you ever encounter any Germans while on the lines?

**JG:** Yes, we had some encounters. We would pick up prisoners and bring them back to Casablanca.

**Q:** Were you ever under aerial attack?

**JG:** Yes, sometimes they'd strafe. We were lucky to get out of there.

**Q:** Did you lose any train crewmen?

**JG:** No, we were fortunate; we didn't lose any in our crew.

**Q:** In Africa, did you see a lot of wildlife?

**JG:** Not too much; maybe a little bit, but mostly kept busy with our work.

**Q:** Now, while you were on the train, what did you have for rations or food?

**JG:** We had GI rations, K rations. Sometimes, we'd cook rattlesnakes, clean them up—tasted pretty good. But most of the time, it was K rations.

**Q:** Were you a brakeman on the train?

**JG:** Yes, and a guard too, posting along the route.

**Q:** What kind of weapon did you carry?

**JG:** A regular carbine rifle.

**Q:** In Africa, did you suffer from any disease, like malaria?

**JG:** Yes, I had malaria a few times. It was rough.

**Q:** You mentioned being wounded. Did that happen in Africa or Italy?

**JG:** In Italy. A car came loose, injured my hand, and broke it. I had to write home with my left hand.

**Q:** Did any Germans wound you?

**JG:** No, just from accidents. Once, a prisoner tried to jump me, but he didn't get far.

**Q:** What did they do with the prisoner?

**JG:** Let's just say he didn't cause trouble anymore.

**Q:** When did you go to Italy?

**JG:** Around late '43, with the 713th Operating Battalion.

**Q:** What was Italy like?

**JG:** It was rough, bombed a lot. Streets were dangerous, and we had to be on guard.

**Q:** Were you at Monte Cassino?

**JG:** Yes, that was something. A bombing took out part of our train, and I was hospitalized after.

**Q:** Were you hit with shrapnel?

**JG:** Concussion mostly. I don't remember much after that.

**Q:** What rank were you at that time?

**JG:** Private First Class.

**Q:** How long were you in the hospital?

**JG:** A while. Nurses were good, but I don't remember much.

**Q:** Where did they send you after the hospital?

**JG:** Casablanca, then back to North Carolina by hospital ship.

**Q:** Did they discharge you, or did you stay in the service?

**JG:** Discharged soon after, back to Whitehall.

**Q:** Did you take time off before working again?

**JG:** Not much; went back to the railroad pretty soon.

**Q:** Your first son was born in 1943?

**JG:** Yes, in January. I was overseas when he was born.

**Q:** Do you remember where you were when the war ended?

**JG:** I was in Whitehall, home by then.

**Q:** Was there a lot of celebration?

**JG:** Yes, especially around the time of the Normandy invasion. Everyone was relieved.

**Q:** When you came back, did you join any veterans organizations?

**JG:** Oh yeah, I was part of the American Legion. I didn't stay with the VFW, though.

**Q:** Did you keep in touch with anyone you served with?

**JG:** I still know a few names, like Dr. Babe. But I didn't attend reunions.

**Q:** Did you make use of the GI Bill?

**JG:** A little. I had some issues with blackout problems, but I did see a doctor about it.

**Q:** How do you think your time in service changed or affected your life?

**JG:** It affected me a lot. I saw a psychiatrist for years; he really helped me.

**Q:** You brought some photographs with you. Can you tell us about them?

**JG:** Sure, here's one from New York City with my buddy. This one was taken in December 1943.

**Q:** Are there any more photos you want to show us?

**JG:** That's it for now.

**Q:** Thank you for your interview.

**JG:** No problem. I've shared a lot; sometimes it shakes me up a bit.

**Q:** You mentioned Naples. Was there a significant eruption while you were there?

**JG:** Yes, we had to stay clear of the volcano. It was a real worry, and the ground shook under us.

**Q:** Did you have local crews working with you in Italy?

**JG:** It was mostly American crews. Some spoke a bit of Italian, and we managed.

**Q:** How was the security situation in Naples?

**JG:** It was dangerous. There were a lot of criminals around, and black market operations were rampant.

**Q:** Did you have problems with things being stolen off the train?

**JG:** Not too much. We had a decent system to keep things secure, but it was tense.

**Q:** Can you describe how dangerous it was in the streets?

**JG:** You couldn't walk the streets alone; it was too risky. A lot of soldiers got in trouble that way.

**Q:** Were there any specific incidents that stood out?

**JG:** Yes, a lot of people were found dead in the streets. It was chaotic, especially around the terminals.

**Q:** How did the locals react to American soldiers?

**JG:** They had mixed feelings—some were friendly, others not so much.

**Q:** You mentioned Naples. What was your experience there?

**JG:** Naples was my mother's hometown. It was rough during the war. The harbor was critical, and we faced constant threats from the Germans.

**Q:** Can you tell me more about your time there?

**JG:** Every night felt tense. We'd see the fighting, and sometimes we were close to it. It was chaotic, and we had to be ready for anything.

**Q:** Did you have any specific experiences with the enemy?

**JG:** Yes, we witnessed explosions and chaos. One time, a train we were on got hit, and it was all hands on deck to deal with the aftermath.

**Q:** How did you and your fellow soldiers cope with those situations?

**JG:** We worked hard to stay safe. When things got dangerous, we had to be quick and alert, always ready to respond.

**Q:** Thank you for sharing that.

**JG:** Thank you for listening.