EUGENE POYNTER

Amthor: This is a portion of the Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940s Program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities.

Today is March 27, 2009, and we're here at the Tiffany Care Center in Mound City, Missouri, in Holt County to do an interview with Eugene A. Poynter who was born on Feb 20, 1924. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. Eugene was in the Army. He was a Staff Sgt. and he's going to tell us a little bit about his life in the 40s and his military service.

Okay, Eugene, why don't you tell us a little bit about where and when you were born, a little bit about your parents' occupations, and if you had any brothers and sisters?

Eugene: Sure. I was born in the big city of Fortescue, Missouri. I have 2 brothers and a sister. My dad used to be a banker. My grandfather and great-grandfather were bankers. He put every one of his boys (he had seven boys) put them in banks and left them. My dad, looking out the window, he always said, he could see those farmers out there working back and forth. It was in the bank of Bigelow where he worked. And he went to farming, so I grew up on a farm. But I grew up over in the bottom. They moved me when I was 4 years old over in what we refer to as Arkansas, between the lake and the river. That's where I was raised, in a big seven -bedroom home and I think we needed it as ornery as us kids were. But then Mom and Dad had come from around Avalon, Missouri, and Chillicothe. Got married young, too, like Betty and I did. So, that's what I wanted to do, too, to farm, which I did.

Amthor: What year did you graduate from high school?

Eugene: Well, the same year and the same day that I got married on – May the 16th, 1941, the last day of school, we ran off and got married. She was 16 and I was 17. Too young to work. I found that out. But we made it, so we'll soon have 68 years together.

Amthor: So tell us what life was like before you got married on the farm. What were some of the things that you did?

Eugene: Well, I just got through writing an article in the paper for the Mound City News about chores about how it used to be. We grew up working. Everyone had things to do. It's one thing about living on the farm. It's a training period for responsibility and trust that will carry you all through your life. It will have an influence on what you do. I've hired a lot of people in the jobs that I've been with companies and there's one thing we always wanted - was that a person had a farming background – grew up on the farm – because you knew you could leave them alone and they'd do their job. But, we just worked 'cause nobody told us it was wrong. See, it's not like it is today. We didn't have the TV to ruin us. We had Mom and Dad. Dad was pretty strict. I mean, he showed you what to do and then you done it. He'd give you a little leeway, but, when I used to play football, why, he knew I was tired and he'd let me sleep on Saturday morning and I didn't have to do any chores which was a good thing. But, Betty and I, after we got married, I was too independent. I didn't want anybody to help us, you know, but it's not independent, really, it was just – I don't know what you would call it. But I went to Kansas City and I couldn't get a job because you had to be 18. I lied about my age again and kept telling everybody I was 18 and I could work a few weeks and I'd have to quit before they fired me. And that's where I was at when Pearl Harbor came along. So I beat it down to the Navy Recruiting Station and told them I wanted to join the Navy. They said, "No, you're underage so you have to have your parents'

permission." And I said, "No, I don't. I said, I'm married and I don't have to have my parents' permission." Said, "You have to have your wife's." She was 100 miles away, so I never made it in for that part of it. But farm life is the best really 'cause I retired out of electronics. I'm an electronics technician with all kinds of licenses.

Amthor: So what did you think about the propaganda? Do you remember what they were saying about the war on the radio or in the newspapers?

Eugene: Well, see, we didn't have any inkling of anything happening at all 'til they came out saying that Pearl Harbor was attacked. And we never, really paid that much attention. I mean we knew it was happening because our cousins and some of them was here and was grabbed right up. Well, some of them were already in 'cause they were starting to bring people in before Pearl Harbor happened even. And, by the way, I've talked to Japanese people. I talked to one for a week I had a president of the International Junior Jaycees and he was a real neat guy, but he found out I was over in Japan, too, and was in the Philippines and he didn't know what Pearl Harbor was 'cause they don't teach that. The history that he was taught was the U S was the aggressor. We invaded Japan. So he left that week, though, with a different understanding of what Pearl Harbor was and, in fact, he was so nice. He was president of a - the big concern - the factory that builds the automobile air conditioner units for all three big companies, over here. So he invited Betty and I to come and stay with him and he'd show us a new Japan, but I still was bitter at that time. That was in 1981, still bitter with the Japanese, they could have paid me and I wouldn't go.

Amthor: So, did you, were you –ended up being drafted since you were underage?

Eugene: Well, I happened to be in Kansas City when they finally came for me to register for the draft, so I just went by the building down there in Kansas City and then we come on back home and never thought anything about it, because what's one draft board to another. And I come back up here and went to farming. My uncle had a place over here by Bigelow he turned loose and I got it, and I just kept farming and they put me in 3A 'cause we had a little girl and was never bothered, and they was drafting everybody and everybody was leaving and most of the time if you stayed on the farm you had a 2C classification. I just had a 3A and nobody bothered me and I was wondering what was going to happen, I wanted to get in. So finally they drug up everybody to see how many able-bodied people they had. So when I came back from Leavenworth I went back to the draft board and had to bring all the papers back for everybody. They told me to just go home and forget it 'cause you'll just be fine. You're doing a great job and I don't know when I found out. The University of Missouri and the local people here sent-- a whole bunch of people here had fixed up a petition for me not to go to the service. So I didn't like that so I asked for the paper- the thing to sign up for immediate induction and I had to have my wife's permission again, but she was there and she signed it and in ten days I was gone, leaving all my crops and stuff in the fields. I went to Tyler, Texas, and started training. And really, no one was, I don't think, was supposed to had any of our family with us, but I got Betty down there anyhow – Betty and Sharon, our little girl, came down. And the funny part of it was, I was on KP that weekend and I went up to the 1st Sgt. and I didn't know what to do 'cause she was coming in and the USO helped us find a place for her to stay. "Well, (he said) if you can bring somebody up here to take your place and I approve of him, why, you can go in and get her, you know, meet her and stuff." So I had to give a guy $10 to take my place and met Betty and got her and put her in that – they had a family - three families living in this one 3-bedroom home - small, and shared the kitchen and all that stuff. But, you know, from then on, I never had a detail on the weekend, but I sure had plenty of them during the week. And just the day that she left, they put me back on KP that weekend. Now, you know, you wouldn't have thought of all

them people or all the guys, service- men, that they'd pay that much attention to somebody. I didn't realize this until after I got older and got back, but that was pretty…

Amthor: Did you get any specialized training?

Eugene: Well, yes, they do, in the infantry. See, when I went in, we was really having a lot of trouble over in Europe and expected a lot more, so they dumped a lot of our training and give extra bayonet training. See, I'm kind of ambidextrous, so I'd have one of the sergeants or trainers would make me do it left- handed or would let me do it left-handed and the others would make me do it right- handed. So I learned I could just pick up a rifle, it didn't make any difference, a bayonet or what. So they cut us short, by that time they kicked me over in the Philippines or, I mean, the South Pacific and we didn't use our bayonets or anything. So our specialty was that. I never had any training on a Thompson Sub Machine Gun, but I got one threw at me as a 2nd Scout over in the Philippines. But, anyhow, that was all my specialty was – 745 was the MOS number. It stays with you all of your life once you're in the infantry, even though you're a sergeant or staff sergeant or whatever you might be. You're always a rifleman.

Amthor: So where did you actually serve after you were done with your training and where did you actually go and what was your actual job?

Eugene: Ok, I was sent to Fort Ord. Fort Ord, California, was the embarkation area for everybody, practically. It was a big place there on Monterey Bay. So I was there just long enough for 'em to group a bunch of us together. And, by the way, the only way I got there was a, rode a civilian train, stood up all the way to Sacramento, California. We didn't have any place to sit. You wouldn't realize how much people was on those trains. Every train was people – people sitting in between the cars, in the steps. I slept at night in the men's restroom where they had some of these chairs that laid back. The third morning I woke up there and couldn't even put my chair down because guys were laying in the floor; there was so many people. So I got, I think, Sacramento was about 100 miles from San Francisco. I got a seat the rest of the way. But – so, they kicked us off there. I shipped out of San Francisco on a vessel that was actually manned by the Coast Guard, owned by the Navy, and was under Army contract and had MPs - Marine MPs on it. So, it was kind of a mixed up thing. It'd only been afloat 14 days. We just got out of San Francisco and – I don't know if you've seen the Golden Gate Bridge. I tell you, that's a sight I never thought I'd see again, when I sit on the back of that ship 'til I could no longer see the Golden Gate Bridge and I didn't get to see it 'til quite a while afterwards. But we just got out of San Francisco a little ways and we had a submarine chase us – see, there was a lot of Japanese subs there that they're not - I've done research on it and I've give talks on the submarines and stuff that were around the San Francisco Bay that was never told to people here, but they chased us 'til we finally lost it, I guess, or they give up or - I accused some of these guys of our people that was in the submarines that it was probably them, that didn't know whether it was a U S ship or Japanese or somebody else, but anyhow they quit and then the next day we had a breakdown on the ship and had to hang up there for three days out in the middle of the ocean while they repaired it and we hit a terrible big storm – a 3-day storm – and we finally got to the Admiralty Islands and an airplane went through the side of our ship and it took a week to get that fixed. And they had to – so then we went to New Guinea – that's where I was supposed to have met the company I was going with - the 33rd Infantry Division, but we finally got there and just started to get off and they said to go back because your outfit has already gone and we're making a landing on another island which was the island of Morotai, so I went back and by the time they come around on the other side of New Guinea and all the way around the different places letting people off and got to Morotai, they'd left Morotai and were making a landing on Luzon.

So I rode an Army duck 2 l/2 miles in there and see the bay was full of ships that was sunk, parts of them still up and some of them still afire. They was still fighting the Japs, you could hear 'em and they had them all corralled in what they called the old city and they didn't want to bombard them 'cause they was trying to save the city. I finally met the guys, the outfit I was to go in to – we was a bunch of dumb– I won't say dumb, but naive country boys. We was setting there on the beach with everything we owned and nobody there. We didn't have anybody to meet us. We didn't know where we was going. We didn't know anything. But what relieved us – now this don't sound very good – but there was some little boys – little Philippino boys came by trying to sell us their sisters for cigarettos and chocolatos, and I told the guys with me that if them little boys can get around, I think we'll be all right until somebody comes to get us. We had guns, but no ammunition. Finally they did. So I got into the 33rd and started into combat and that was nothing but the Japanese and foxholes and we took – helped take, went across Clark Field 'cause it was still burning and airplanes was on fire and dead Japs and dead Americans. See, you couldn't - the way it was, we got across that place, but we finally took - our object, main one, at that time, was to take the big city of Baguio and Luzon, which was the summer capital where the wealthy and the government people came every summer 'cause it was cooler in the mountains and it's a big, nice city, but we had absolutely destroyed it and they made us stay out there in the foxholes for – I didn't think we was ever going to get to go into the city and get through it, you know. We found out, probably 40 years later, that the reason we had to sit out there and sweat this all out was because the emperor of Japan's birthday was going to be that next day, which I think would have been the 27th of April. He would have been 47 years old. And they thought, well, if the Japanese people would hear of this surrender of this big city of Baguio on the day of his birthday, it would demoralize the people, and they'd never have known it, I'm sure, but that's what we had to do. But that first night we had been sleeping in foxholes every night. But, foxholes aren't so bad it – when you're in combat, it gets, the foxhole is the only thing you've got left – it's the only thing that's yours – 'cause you dig the hole and it's your home, nobody bothered you unless it's the Japanese, which they did every night, try to do something, understand that - but nobody was supposed to get in it or anything or you're not supposed to get out of it yourself, once you get in it, at night and stuff, but, so we still had our same clothes – see, I didn't have nothing with me, we had to leave all of our stuff. I never thought I'd ever see it again – but, just what the clothes we had on and our ponchos, shelter half, canteen, first aid, and our cartridge belt, and that was about it with our rifle and stuff. We had our fatigue, our field jacket rather, but other than that, that was all we had that was all the clothes we had for - I don't know how long it was before the time we took our socks off and jungle rot and we liked to never had any clothes 'cause we was moving fast and nobody was going to be up there with us, but after we got Baguio taken, we done something we wasn't supposed to do, probably, but somebody said, "Let's go sleep inside this capital building 'cause it was high and dry and it hadn't been bothered too much at all with the bombing and stuff that we had done. So there was a big conference table inside there and there was 17 of us laid on that conference table and slept that night, and, of course, they kicked us out of there the next morning. But I often wondered whatever happened to that poor old table- I was in the State theater one night and it was quite awhile after that, maybe, 15 years or sometime, they was showing a newsreel and showed them all meeting at this place in Baguio and there that old table was and I told Betty I said, "Well, we surely didn't bother it too much." But that was one of the best sleeps I'd had for probably six weeks or more. But they wanted us to go look at this church so we went and right over the hill from us in all this pile of rubble. Now everything was destroyed and was still smoking and burning, just bodies and everything else laying around, too. There this church set, not touched. Just right -just as brightly as – it was a Catholic cathedral of some type and I walked around it and I could only find two holes in the stained glass windows over on the north side and they weren't very big. That's all that happened to that church. But, I heard some heavy machinery working, so I went over there to see what was happening and had bulldozers digging deep ditches, big long

ditches, and throwing all the bodies in it, and there was, Americans, civilians, Philippinos, American soldiers, and the Philippino soldiers, and everybody that they hadn't been claimed. Now I found out afterwards, they let the Philippino people claim their relatives' bodies, but the rest of them all were put into these ditches and covered up. But see, it didn't take but just a matter of days, they were eaten up with maggots and they had to do something because of disease – I thought it was terrible, but it wasn't. It was what they had to do. But I would have liked to have went back 'cause I wondered what kind of Wal-Mart had a parking lot right over the top of it cause they never went back – they couldn't go back and do anything with those people. Betty got to meet one of the guys – we was out in Scottsdale, Arizona, at a big meetings and one of the guys was telling about throwing the bodies in that ditch, so, at least, she got to verify I wasn't dreaming on the thing. But I was up in Milwaukee to a meeting and there was a young fellow came in there – came by – and handed me two sheets of paper. He said, I think you need these or want these. And one of 'em was an up-to-date picture of that church there in Baguio with everything built up around it just like it never had happened. He gave me that and then he gave me one of the highway that we fought our way up through getting into Baguio. And all he said was, he says, "I think you need these." I don't know who he was. I never seen him any more after that. But how he knew I wanted something like that, I don't know, but he did. And I put it in my book that I wrote. I wrote a book on the subject. Anyhow, we – then we had to – the old general, Japanese general, was who we was after there in Baguio. He was gone, of course. But he lived in an underground place there on the southern slopes there out of Baguio. It had 40 rooms underground. And they were all really set up with all the fancy, finest furniture that the Philippinos had – they had in there and they had all these heavy rugs on the earth floor and they had it fixed up with ventilation and stuff where they couldn't bomb him. They couldn't even throw poison gas at him the way they had it fixed up, but he was gone because – he went on further north and they finally got him. But I thought that was – I couldn't believe anybody could do that, but, see, they used our people for slave labor all the time and they had a lot of stuff done, but see, this is what we run into all the time. See, they were waiting for us to come back, so we'd run into Japanese and maybe there'd be from 50 to 200 of them and left there to die. I mean, we didn't take a prisoner, because you didn't take a Japanese prisoner, because he wasn't going to be a prisoner. It was either him or you, so - 'cause he – they thought it was the thing to do to die for the emperor and they did, I mean, this is the way it was. So they would sacrifice those many people and they'd move on back to another stronghold they had.

That's just the way they fought. And so we run short of ammo. We was short of about everything – water- we got to where we couldn't - we had to have water dropped by air 'cause we didn't have any – we was out of halazone tablets to purify the water. We was out of Atabrine tablets for malaria. We all had malaria. We were all sick with about everything that there was, I guess, you could get, but we had air drops for quite a little bit up in through there with C 47s and then the little grasshoppers dropped stuff out to us, blood and ammo. But about that time they told me I was a 2nd Scout and handed me this Thompson Sub-Machine Gun and I'd never seen one in my life and so that was one we should have had training on, but they dumped it on account of the bayonet training, but I was a boy growing up with guns, so by the time I was the 2nd one to get on this hill and I knew how to use it and I did and it was one of the greatest weapons that we had because at one time we were pinned down – fired – thought 300 rounds. And was - and I was wounded and so was the 1st Scout, but they pulled us off and we was to make a push company the next day or we were supposed to be the Push Company and here I would have been the 2nd man and wherever the heck was I going and I didn't have any ammunition and they didn't have any for me, but some of the guys – a lot of them sneaked in – they weren't supposed to carry 45s unless you had been given one for whatever your problem was, or whatever you was doing, but they all dug in and each one of my magazines held 30 rounds and they dug in enough that I had enough for 30 rounds out of 10 magazines – just had one magazine, but some of the guys had quite a few. One of the guys said, "Poynter, if you want to crawl back up there up there where we

had our big problem and he said, "We'll cover you." So I crawled up there on that blessed place and I found all my things, but there was one of them that was still full. I had undoubtedly changed it in a hurry or dropped it or something, but all the rest of them I shot at them derned Japs to keep them off from us, so I did have 2 things to start off with 60 rounds. I ordinarily carry 300, but thank heavens, they called off the deal and I didn't have to go that next day until we finally got some ammunition, but we were short of that all the time and clothes. But it's understandable because we were – see, old MacArthur, as soon as we had taken Baguio, MacArthur says that there's nothing left on Luzon but just mopping up and he was sure right there on that, but that's when we lost most of our people. And we, myself included, at one time, if he'd have walked up to us, I don't think he'd have walked back any more. I mean, really, we felt that way about it, but after I got older and got back out, I could see he was pretty good. He knew what he was doing. So that's the way I went to there, but we finally got – well, the way we got some clothes is kind of – we never had much rest areas 'cause we, you know, they'd bring us in for what they called – maybe we'd be there for 48 hours or something and we might stay there one night or maybe 2 nights, but one time we was there for two days and just as soon as we got in there, they'd load us all up on trucks and made us leave our guns there and took us to this Quartermaster Depot area where they'd just dumped things off the ships, you know, they were some of them out in the water, you had all these big bundles of clothes and different things that they should have had taken care of , you know, or something, and they had all of this stuff and they said, "You guys have got to help straighten this thing up," and you can imagine, coming out of combat, how happy we was. So, anyhow, somebody said, "Poynter, what do you think?" I said, "Well, I know what the heck I'm going to do. I don't care what you guys do." But we just kind of made a little dressing room and we just took off all of our old rags and we had new socks, we had underwear, we had handkerchiefs, we had everything. We put on two pairs of fatigues, we put on two of those things, you know, and got some new combat boots and we walked out of there with those things. So they sent us back again the next day, so some of the guys, we had some of the other guys old clothes on, you see, and then walked back out with them and that's the way we got our clothes. That's the ones we still had when we went out of Japan after they surrendered. But, anyhow, they would almost – I wont' say that, but I'll say we almost had the first race riot in America or in Luzon, maybe, but there was other people that were supposed to be taking care of it and they weren't doing nothing. But, anyhow, going back to those rest areas, it was better to be up in combat 'cause at least you had your own hole and you could take care of yourself. But we lost people - see, every night we set up booby traps to keep the Japs out when they come in, and one night right across from me there was a shot went off in the night and, of course, it wasn't unusual for them to come in on you at night if they could, and so everybody – you don't sleep anyhow. You just lay in a stupor, I guess, and wishing and be happy when the daylight comes again, but we didn't know exactly what happened, but one of the guys, this fellow had got up, see, we all had dysentery, and you're supposed to never get out of your hole regardless, your foxhole, but this guy did. We was dug in three close together and it happened to be his turn at guarding and he got up and went out and when he come back, this guy, one of the buddies with him, heard this noise and shot him. He had to lay there all night until daylight and I helped carry him in. But, it's just the way it is. I mean, you don't take chances. You can't take chances. I observed a banzai attack. It would have been us. We were in a reserve company and we were supposed to push the next morning. We were supposed to move up into this one area, and just as we was getting ready to go, we got word to wait because it was the first time we'd seen any Philippino soldiers and here this was a Philipino we was helping. They'd come by there and there was an American sergeant leading them and he was ready to go home, but he wanted to do this with them because he'd trained these guys and they dug in, right below us and they had a big banzai attack that night, and they was cleaned about all out. I was one of the first ones down there the next morning. They'd killed the sergeant, too. He later on got a medal of honor – winner of the thing. His father got it. But he had killed - 30 some Japs-- was laying out in front

of him that time, and do you know what? Other than the Philippinos that was laying there dead, there wasn't a Philippino left. They was gone. That's the last we ever saw of any Philippino solders. I wondered then, "Well, what in the world happened?" but I don't blame them, I guess. I finally got so bad. I was so sick - malaria and everything else. I don't know what all we did have. They pulled the 3rd battalion off out of combat and left the 1st and 2nd on there 'cause in my squad there was only 3 of us left and the rest of us was either wounded or special detail or something, but, so they pulled us off of it. That day, that night before, we spent all day climbing this blessed mountain. We'd get up there on top of what they called Skyline Ridge. It was supposed to have been 'cause people was coming north, too, our people, and the Japs in between, so we had a mess of them there. So they wanted to get us all up there and, but we was so sick and it rained. Just kept sprinkling, that's one of them deals when you say you take one step forward and two backwards and we was sick and we finally got up there and we didn't even dig a foxhole. We just laid on the ground and covered up with our shelter half or poncho and just lay there. And the next morning they could see what terrible shape we was so they sent us down to a convalescent camp to get well. I spent quite a while in there and ended up with intestinal worms, and stomach virus and malaria, jungle rot, otherwise, we was in pretty good shape. I was down to about 130 pounds, probably. We couldn't eat. The only thing I was surviving on was – in those C rations - I always called them a hockey puck – it was a little thing just about like that of condensed oatmeal and you're supposed to have a stove and heat this water and put this in it and all that, but that's all I kept. I kept it in my pocket and I'd chew a little bit of that every once in while and then I'd eat a little bit of tropical Hershey bar if I could get a hold of one and that's all I could keep down. Anyhow, they got us so we could eat and fatten us up and got us ready for the invasion into Japan. While we was waiting when I finally got up to where I was well enough to do anything at all, I never got sick at my stomach, and I don't know who told everybody this, but I had to take a crew and go out - our squad - to where we had been ambushed and people had been shot up and they never could get them out, you know, so that would have been like 6 to 8 weeks before, since it'd happened, and I had to go down wherever they was at and get their dog tags and bring it up. We just used an old steel helmet and put dog tags in it and pulled it back up with a rope, myself, too. You know, it's amazing. These are our guys. You know, they're still over there somewhere. They've got to be. And I came back after the war and I helped at some of the funerals of some of the ones that's brought back and it got to bothering me so bad I just quit. I just knew that none of our people could have been in any casket. Maybe that's not a very good way of looking at it. Anyhow, they got everybody down there and we went through this period of time with people losing their minds and, well, we used to call them Section 8. The guys would just go crazy about worrying about what they were going to have to do. One of the best guys I ever knew – he was one of our BAR men and I was in combat with him, and he was from Kentucky. And I come back through there one day and he hollered at me, "Poynter, you've got to have some help." And he had his BAR (Browning automatic rifle) set up and was shooting. Anything that moved, he was shooting. He said the Japs was here and the Japs was there and he was a big guy. It took six of us to hold him while the medics gave him a shot. They took him off and I don't know whatever happened to him. But this is what happened to people who was setting there getting ready for the invasion of Japan, 'cause they knew most of us wasn't going to make it back, we went out on amphibious training for three weeks on ships and stuff and we'd have to – to go through all of it just exactly what we was going to do when we went into Japan. And we had done it for so long that good old Uncle Sam had - we had good clothes, you know, by then. They didn't have very good thread that held them things together. It's just so funny, you'd be walking along once and have that good combat boot go into three pieces and they'd just rotted with the salt water and rice paddies and stuff. Anyhow, that made it happen. That's where we was. We was just finishing that up when we got the word that Truman dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima. This was on August the 6th, 1945. And, you talk about a celebration. We was just dumbfounded. I mean, it hit you. It was kind of a delayed action for us guys because we

knew, it was getting to the point where, you know, this is it. And, so, the ships and stuff was ready, was there, see, so when, after they dropped the 2nd bomb on the 9th on Nagasaki, they decided to kick the people in, but actually the Japanese didn't surrender until the 2nd of September in that year, so we went in on the 20th, I think it was. We were the first troops where we went in at. Occupation was worse than combat – the way we were treated. We found out fast that we were the enemy, with our own people. Our own Army treated us bad. And the things we couldn't do, the things we did do, but, I don't know. We went out to the – well, first, they dumped me off at Hiroshima. There was two truckloads of us that was dumped at Hiroshima and we was to go to Himeji, which maybe to the truck driver, maybe they both sounded the same, I don't know, or maybe they thought they was going to leave us there, because I found out later there was some of them went into Nagasaki, too, at the same time, so maybe they was trying to take us to guard duty or something, but we got radiation. I come home with radiation poisoning and stuff. But the Japanese people- at first, we never seen any surrendered weapons. We never seen any surrendered Japanese soldier. I thought, where are them people. They ought to be happy that the war is over, but we never seen any. We did find some stuff. Finally they let us search for stuff, and the outfit, I had a platoon by that time and they - found stuff that was hid back in the mountains, you know, underground, was all hid and like this here wall. You'd tear that wall down and there was big rooms all back in there that was hidden with armament, machinery and equipment and stuff they could use and then they wouldn't let you look anymore after you found some things, you know. They took our guns away from us. I found some of my guards missing. We'd find them with their throats cut when they were off somewhere and the Japanese done it with no way of protection. We broke into a warehouse when we was over there. One of the guys said, "Poynter, I know where there's some guns if you want to get some." I said, "Can we get in?" We crawled into a window and got enough handguns, small guns, just to where we could pass them out to our guards so we'd have – feel - you know, you take a guy, an infantryman, without a weapon, he's - I don't know what you do call him - he's gone. He's just not right, but it makes a big difference, so we'd keep these guns hid, and pass them on to each other. It made you feel better. Finally they give them back, but by that time, we had had a lot of problems and we was supposed to come home. We got word we was coming home and I had charge of the group of guys that was going to clean all the weapons that this K Company had– I mean everything, bazookas, machine guns, everything that had been through all these invasions. We had this little lieutenant and I don't know where in the world he came from, but he thought they should be new, just like new and we had to put them in boxes of a certain size and so many in a certain box, and they all had to be cleaned, packed in cosmoline and wrapped and put in there and nailed all in and have a slip inside telling what it was and also one on the outside. We did all that and do you know what happened to it? It didn't go home. See, we thought everybody was going home because there was a lot of ships over there that had to come back, a lot of airplanes that had to come back. But instead we put everything on trucks, even our extra clothing we had. They were all put in boxes, and all we had left was just our personal stuff and what we had we had to have, put 'em on trucks and put them on barges and pushed them out into the Tokyo Bay and dumped them in there, everything we had, jeeps, trucks, everything. And I was one of the few that knew what was happening. I questioned them about it and they told me right quick the reason they did it. It was because it was too expensive to bring back home. I often wondered how quick the Japanese was in pulling some of it back out. But that was bad. Then we got to where they took the Japanese word before us. Every day we'd have to fall company out and Japanese would come up through there and maybe some old momasan with some cute girls with them, and if they pointed a finger at you, you were gone. We had officers there and MPs and they were gone. You didn't know where they went. We'd have to gather all their clothes up and turn them in and that stuff, you know. I didn't know what happened until just before I came home. They sent me around to four stockades to get some signatures from the guys. You ought to see where they were kept. It was terrible. And these were our own people. And so many of them – they'd

kept, some of them I knew, - would beg me to get them out of there. Well, I couldn't get them out, you know. I had nothing to do, but they didn't even know why they were in there. I don't know how they put that on their record, either. So I came home not too happy with a lot of things, really. I was pretty disillusioned with what they had done to us. When I came home into Seattle, Fort Lawton, all together, I spent 80 some days on a boat and I was in the infantry. Tried to get me there, somewhere else, here then back. Probably got more or as much as Bob Moore had in the Navy. Probably more than a lot of them did. But anyhow, but I know I slept in more foxholes than a lot of them did. I think I slept 90 some days in one. But anyhow, that part was understandable, but a lot of the things they did, some of the others, I just couldn't understand a lot of it. When we came in to Fort Lawton, do you know what the first thing I saw was? German prisoners of war! They ran that place. They done everything but guard duty. Here they were, the nicest looking guys, young men, you ever saw. Blond headed, blue eyed, and all about the same size. Here they had on suntans, the neatest army suntan clothes that you ever saw, the only difference was they had PW on the back. And I told one of the guys, "Well, damn, there's them clothes we were supposed to have had. There's our clothes." And I couldn't believe they took those prisoners like that and they were marching, you know. You couldn't believe how good those guys could march. Everything was just perfect. I mean, it just beat everything I ever seen in the American Army. I just kept thinking about our people. I seen in the Philippines - I should have mentioned that. We overran one prisoner of war camp there. It was an awful place. There was no Japs left, but the guys were just standing out there in front of their cages, if you want to call it that, or whatever, but we had orders not to talk to them. We couldn't talk to them or do anything. Just to get on out of there and leave them alone, so we did. So I don't even know who they were, but it would have been nice to talk, but we didn't have time to do that either. I was sick, I was sick all the way across the ocean. The guys helped me. They couldn't understand why I wouldn't go to sick leave. If I go to sick leave, they'll put me in the hospital and I'll never get out. "I want to go home. But I was in the hospital in Japan for awhile. I passed out and someone picked me up and put me in a jeep and took me to the hospital. That's not on my record either. None of that stuff gets on there, but anyhow, even when I come across on the boat, getting in it and everything. I never even knew these guys, they were saying, "You're sick, fellow." I said, "Yes." They'd help me. They'd carry my stuff. The way they are, if you couldn't do it yourself, if you were in bad trouble. But that's the way I come in and that's the way they did all the way across America to get into Fort Leavenworth. We got in there on a Saturday night about 10:00 and they treated us like criminals. You can't hardly blame them on a weekend, but they said, "Just go find you a barracks. Go to barracks # so and so forth. If you want to go to sleep, there's some pillows and stuff and somewhere else and go fix it up." So we did. They said we're not going to get out until Monday morning. About 2:00 in the morning they got us up and said, "We're going to get you out at 5:00 in the morning." I was a civilian. And they run us through. I don't know what I signed. I was too sick. They just said sign it and you did. So I signed it. That's the reason I ended up getting called up to Korea and stuff again because I'd signed it - enlisted, inactive, reserves. I didn't even know what I'd done. It didn't matter. But I did have enough sense to call Betty. She knew. I called her from Seattle, but why I didn't call the folks or Betty to come and pick me up at Leavenworth. Here they was going all over here meeting trains and bus stations. I was the last one out of Kansas City on the Trailways Bus to get into Mound City. But I didn't feel right. I didn't know. I wasn't over there that long, but I went through a terrible mess of stuff, and I didn't know, honestly, did not know how I would take being back, really. Then after I seen everybody it was okay. You know, but it was different. And I feel sorry and I work with a lot of veterans now, and have been ever since I put that wreath on The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, before then I would not do nothing. But now I have been.

Kelley: Let me stop you right there and I have another tape. We'll have another hour.

Kelley: And I hope I didn't mess up the momentum there. One thing I do want to know about is the radiation sickness.

Eugene: Okay.

Angela Bowness: What did Hiroshima look like when you first walked in? Can you give us a description? But you can go ahead now.

Eugene: Okay. So, anyhow, we came back. Betty was living in Fortescue and I was supposed to really help my dad. My mom was sick. In fact, she died two years after I got back. So I did, for awhile, I couldn't, and Betty had to doctor me. I was in bed with malaria. I'd have those high fevers. She'd put cold patches on me – cold rags, and I'd have those chills, blankets, and I started having those nightmares and she'd bring me out of those. I was just really messed up, but I did not want anything, help from Uncle Sam. I mean, I could have got in on this 5220 Club or what they called it, and I had some money left from where we sold out on this farm. It wasn't very much, but Betty never spent any, I mean, really, it didn't take too much with the folks helping her, mine and her folks,too, while I was gone. But, so, we were just living off of our savings, really, which was crazy, I guess. I should have done like everybody else, but I didn't. But anyhow, it was Doc Hogan, he was the old doctor here, and he and Betty worked with me all of the time, but I went sick on something else. They didn't know what it was. And I ended up with my arms swelled up and my legs swelled up and I was sleeping on pillows like this and I was back to farming by then, too, and I'd have to get up in the morning though and get on that blessed tractor again to get my crops in, you know, but he worked with Uncle Sam and they tried some experimental drugs on me and it brought all this down. Of course, I lost part of my thyroid, and my teeth all went soft, and I can't get through a security place at all because in the security gate you can put a wand this close to me anyplace on my body and it goes off. It's kind of embarrassing. I like to never got out of Washington D. C. when I was back there, but I finally just told those three people that had me down there, I said, "Well, you're just down to shrapnel now. Of course, anybody with common sense would tell you that shrapnel would just be in one place, but this was all over me. They just said, "Go ahead." But back to Hiroshima, where I stood, they had it barricaded across there. It was still smoking. The Japanese people were in there working all the time. Whether it was some they couldn't get out or whether it was some that was cleaning up, I assume that was probably what they were doing. But it was really a mess. And I have had people in our division tell me, "You did not go to – you was not at Hiroshima." I was the director in our division and we've gotten letters from widows that had lost their husbands that was with us over there and they had written on their death certificate that they'd died at so on and so forth as a result of radiation. That's on their things. Of course, Uncle Sam, if you want to call him that, denied it, until, well, I got a call from a guy in St Louis that was with me at the time and he's had steel rods in his back for years and his legs are all in braces and stuff from being there in Hiroshima and the VA had admitted this for a long time, but they would not, stand behind their convictions. They would not put their name on anything because they didn't want to get involved with anything with that big a controversy, I guess. But finally there was a little new VA doctor that he had said, "Yes, you've got radiation poisoning and it needs to be brought to the attention of the people in Washington DC," so I had to verify over the phone that this guy's name was Frank Scroi out of St Louis, that Frank was with me when we was there in Hiroshima. So it went to Congress. He was one of the many ones, I'm sure, that was there, but right after that, they finally acknowledged – it came out in the veterans VFW magazine – that they said there's a possibility that 162,000 of us that had been radiated from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But anyhow, I'm lucky, because if it hadn't been for old Doc Hogan, 'cause he brought me into this world, so he was responsible for me, I guess, but if it hadn't been for him and Betty, why, I wouldn't have made it. It's – I don't know, I am going to give a talk next month, I guess, on prisoners of war.

This here Gitmo stuff kind of aggravates me - but we've got so many people that knows everything, but have no idea what's going on.

Amthor: Now, you said you were on Luzon. How long did it take to take that island over?

Eugene: Well, see, when the Japanese took Luzon over in 1942, first landed, the first initial ones that went into Luzon was in February of '45. So it's - to clear this all out, when you look at the history books, everything, even our own book that's written about our division, it was written by another regiment, not the one that I was in. They quit putting anything in it until sometime in June. But, see, the guys were still fighting up until sometime after the fourth of July they were still up there fighting and stuff. They were still – some of them was still doing that when we went on amphibious training. So I don't know.

Amthor: Now, I heard from another veteran that was there that it was like 365 days, possibly. Does that sound like the time that it would take to – I mean they fought for that many days in a row. Is that.....?

Eugene: Is that Luzon? That's probably right. Probably pretty close. I don't know how much – you lose track of days. Now like I say February – it wasn't a year, though, I don't think. Really, I do not know after we left because, see, they were straggling in for a long time after that. I never trusted and I didn't like any of those Philippinos in the lowlands. They were too much like politicians, I guess, I don't know. But the ones up in the mountains were so great a people. We had – we run across this Igarot tribe, the last of that culture, a type of people. They helped us. They loved Americans. They hated Japanese. And they carried our wounded out for us. We never had much wounded. I had to help carry out one guy one time. It took ten of us to carry him out. And thank heavens, we run across a group of those Igarots and talked them into taking him somewhere and we went back. But they were mountain people and they were really something. Well, they'd tell you where there was Japanese. They was real good – there was this one time they come hollering at us to tell us the Japanese – we cleaned out all of them but three that quit. And this old chief wanted those three prisoners as a reward for telling us about them. I was standing there by this young lieutenant. I don't even know who or whether he was any of our people. He was asking him and he says, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "Give them to him." Well, what that old boy did – you know. They carried them bolo knives. That's their livelihood because they used them on the pineapples, bananas, and the coconut trees, and bamboo. It was quite a weapon. It's just like that, that first Japanese was in pieces laying on the ground. This lieutenant, I just led him off of there. We don't know what happened to the other two, but I'm sure they went the same way, but that's how the hatred was for them. But then, we just – we couldn't have prisoners in the first place. Even if they'd all surrendered, I don't know what we'd have done with them. Like we were doing, now other units maybe yes, but where we were pushing and pushing and pushing. We didn't have enough stuff for ourselves, food, and stuff like that, even if they would have wanted to surrender.

Amthor: Now, is that where the Bataan Death March was?

Eugene: No, that was in Corregidor. Ok, when I took a jeep trip across America, I talked to bunches of veterans. I wanted to tell you about this one little old boy, Glen Lyons. He was up in Columbus, Ohio. I was there and this other guy come over to me and we was at this museum. They'd met us with another old jeep to lead us into town and wanted to show us this museum. They had TV and all that stuff all over the country. But this little old Glen Lyons, he's the neatest little old man, 90 some years old then, and he was talking to me. Of course, I talk to everybody. And this guy I was with was a PR man. He promoted this WWII Memorial and the National

Army Museum while I was out talking to people. This little Glen, well, he wanted to tell me he was in Corregidor. He was with General Wainwright and MacArthur over there when the Japanese were invading the Philippines and he was one of the ones that had to stay there with General Wainwright while MacArthur went to Australia and set up his temporary headquarters. And so they had to surrender – their orders was to surrender to the Japanese because they were short of food and ammo and there was a lot of sickness and stuff. So they said that this would be fine because the Japanese would take care of them all right, and they did. He was in the Bataan Death March, old Glen was. And then he was a slave laborer in the Philippines for quite a while in the mines. Then they took him to Japan and put him in the mines over there. In fact, he was one of those shield soldiers you've heard them talk about. You know what I mean? What they are? That's where they line up a bunch of our prisoners like they did them. They did this in Kobe, Japan. He was one of the shield soldiers there where they let Americans know that they have their prisoners of war right there where they were going to bomb, see, so maybe they won't bomb. But that's where old Glen was. You know, when two veterans get together, you know, they're friends, automatically. I said, "You need to be telling people this." He said, "I did. We had what they call Bring a Vet to School, and he signed up to go to 6 different schools." And I said, "Well, how did you do?" He said, "Well, I went to the first one and got about halfway through it and I fainted and they had to carry me out." And do you know why, he said, all these years I had been harboring a hatred, I had a really bad feeling toward the Japanese, but he said, and once I got to telling this and it dawned on me that who I was the maddest at was the Army, U S Army for making me put up and go through what I did - when we wanted to die. We wanted to – all of us guys, he said, wanted to fight until we'd never give up, never surrender." And that was just exactly the way he felt. I've found a lot of guys like this all the way across. It's unbelievable how it is. A lot of them – I've talked to guys that have never looked at their discharge papers, at all. They're still bitter about some of this – like me. I was, and I was until I put this wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and something happened to me. I came back, wrote a book, made a nuisance of myself about everything because it should be told, whether it's good or bad. So it's bad for these guys coming back, too. We didn't have any psychiatric treatments, but we needed them, I think. But anytime, any soldier or anybody, when you take someone's life, I don't care if you – they can take all of those psychiatric treatments – it may help you get adjusted to it, but you're never going to cure it. It's always in your mind, it's always there. I - through one of my operations I had a, lost some of my immune system and I went back to having malaria again and all that kind of stuff and Betty can attest that I started having nightmares again and I had three of them the last three years and I hit her in the night, blacked her eye, bruised her face all up to here. Before, when I had them for about two years after I got back, I always ended up on the floor. But I told her this time I was too old and the bed was too soft. I couldn't get out of bed or couldn't roll out of bed. 'Cause you don't know what you're doing. It's bad, it's terrible, and it's always going to be with a person. It's just one of them things. It took three ministers over a span of probably three years to convince me to ever go back to church when I came home. I didn't think I was fit to be in church, you know, with what I had to do. But I know I wasn't alone – wasn't the only one.

Amthor: I won't keep you. So let's talk about your medals over there. You brought them along. I'd like to hear about your medals.

Eugene: Well, that's, of course, a bronze star, but that's not too much, either, I guess. But I was put in for a silver star and - I and another 1st Scout. We were both put in for the same thing, and I took mine out because he got wounded real bad and I thought he deserved it, not me, but I wasn't smart enough to know that two people can get it for the same thing. So I didn't do it. Now this is a commendation award from this certificate here signed by the general of our division for work I had done in the Philippines. Of course, this is the good old Conduct Medal. But this is the thing

here. Combat Infantry Badge. You know, they get that if you're still alive and been subjected to enemy fire and stuff. And that's to me – that's the one that's the most to me 'cause I know what it took to get that. But this is one from the Philippines itself. Uncle Sam don't give it to you. They give you the ribbon, but – this is the ribbon, but the medal has to come from the Philippines or buy it yourself and stuff like that. And this is just the Asiatic Pacific deal. And Occupation and World War II Victory and this is a Presidential Unit Citation from the Philippine government. Now they came over and presented that to people in St Louis and Kansas City and just before my name came up to get it, they got crossways with the United States again, and shut it all down. So they told me I could buy one myself. They give me a certificate to show that I had one coming, so I ordered one and had it. Anyhow, that's understandable. This is the 33rd. And I was in the 24th too, for a little while. This is, of course, Staff Sergeant. This is a medal that just came out. It's the – is the Philippine – this is the Liberation and this is the - it's not the defense, gosh, I guess it is, too, anyhow, they didn't have that. This one had more – going across the country, I had to get a uniform when we went across in this jeep and they decided that we would need a uniform like it was when we come out, so I had to get a hold of – I had some suntans and all this kind, and I had my old regular one, this is a boughten one. This is what we used to call a Ruptured Duck. It's actually a symbol that shows that you were honorably discharged in World War II. Because the reason is that so many of us got out and we didn't have any clothes but what we had in the Army for a few days and you might go plumb across the country and rather than the MPs pick you up for being AWOL or something, why, they could see that this was mandatory that they sewed that over the right pocket of everything you had before they discharged you. So that's why we always called it a Ruptured Duck. When we were coming across the country in that jeep, all of our camera people, about all of them were young women and I'm telling you, they could ask you so many questions. They wanted to ride in that jeep and they wanted to do everything, see, but then, I don't know how many of them asked me, what is that? I've never seen that. I would say it's a Ruptured Duck before I thought. They'd want to know what that was, I said, they always told me –when you got that, you went home just like an old Ruptured Duck. That's all I ever knew about it. That's one thing – up until just a couple or three years ago, they'd let them reproduce. And, you know, it's bigger than the original one, so I don't know what the deal is. Why, but it's just kind of funny how they do some of the stuff.

Amthor: I have one last question for you. Thinking about the war that you were in, WWII, and thinking about the war of today, what are some similarities or some of the things that stand out, that are different?

Eugene: Well, the first thing is most of your orders is given through a laptop computer. Did you know that? We didn't have that, see. We had runners or people. You passed the word on. And you didn't have to wait for orders. See, that was what our training was. You done things automatically. If you didn't, why, you didn't come home. I know, I've talked to guys, that was in the infantry over there and that's in combat and this deal where, it hasn't been too long ago - they raised a lot of fuss and this one guy came into this building, you know, and turned around and shot this guy laying over there and they claimed he was maybe already dead or wounded or something like that and raised a fuss about it. I think they even brought him up for court martial or something like that. It's kind of bad. Well, there's a lady here in town and she says, "Well, Gene, what would you have done?" I said, "Well, after I shot the reporter, I would have shot him, too, again." That's what you're supposed to do. It started with the Vietnam War, reporting, you know, and everything. We didn't have that much coverage, thank heavens. Betty never knew where I was at. I've e-mailed these guys over there, you know. It's just unbelievable how much different things are. But, still, it comes down to basic things that they've got to do the same things. If you're in a war against somebody or however it is, they have to come down man-to-man, the process of elimination somewhere or you never get done. They've got better equipment.

I don't see how they carry it. I told Betty, we'd still be struggling trying to get through the Luzon if we had had that much clothes on. It looks like it's heavy, but I know it's not that bad. We had no armor plate, we had nothing. We just had steel helmets that we used to bathe in, used for cooking, for bathroom and everything else. I don't know. I think the biggest difference is reporting and the way they did everything and we didn't have as many politicians. We have more politicians in these wars anymore, I think, than good people, I guess that's the way it's going to be anymore. We had good people. That's one thing about it. I've heard a lot of stories after I got back. I've heard these the last few years that if people had asked me going across the country when we did, what do you guys think about the problem with the draftees and the regular Army guys? I said, "What are you talking about? " I said, "Lord, we never had any problem." They said, "You know, everybody worked together." I don't know how they're doing it now. I don't know. But it's bad, and I hate to see anybody have to go through what the rest of us did. I've said a lot of things is bad, but it was a good part of my life, really. I mean, after it's all said and done, I would go do it again, too, really, though. I don't know whether Betty would go for that. I haven't got all of the letters she wrote me yet. She claims she wrote me every day, but I don't know whether she did or not because I never got them. And my mom did, too. She wrote a lot. But the bad thing about all of us guys is that we did not tell what was happening. I never told my folks. They didn't know why I was sick. They didn't know anything about it. They didn't know – I know, I got ahold of my mother's diary probably 10 years after she died. And she'd - about every day, it'd say, Gene's sick again and we don't know what's the matter with him. Gene had to go home sick. But that's a terrible thing to do to your folks. Anyhow, I don't think I – that war wouldn't last long if I'd go over there.

Amthor: Well, thank you for coming in and sharing today. We have really enjoyed it. You've had us sitting on the edge of our seats.