

INTERVIEW

John E. Schmidt

YEAR

2006

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: John E. Schmidt

DATE: June 19, 2006

PLACE: Montezuma, KS

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

John E. Schmidt, one of thirteen children, was drafted in 1944, ending his farm deferment. He went to Fort Leavenworth for physical and was sent to California for training in the infantry. Before his basic training was completed, he was sent overseas and in just days found himself on the front line in the Battle of the Bulge. He had strong religious teaching in his background and knew that he could not shoot a man. His life in Belgium was taken up with trying to save his life. The severe winter, at that time, made his life miserable. His unit lived off the countryside and spent many wet nights in foxholes. He was in a unit that retrieved stolen art objects and gold from a large salt mine in Germany. He then served in the occupation force after Germany fell to the allied armies. After discharge near Chicago, he came home to live in Michigan, Arkansas, and now is back in his home area at Montezuma.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Entering the service and training and life as a part of war zone front line action in Belgium and Germany. His overseas experience and his childhood in a dustbowl era were discussed.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 hour

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 22 pages

ORAL HISTORY
Schmidt, John E
Interview Date: June 19, 2006

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: John E Schmidt (JES)
Tape 1 of 1
Side A

JS - You were maybe fifteen or sixteen at the time the war started?

JES - Yes.

JS - That's right. Do you remember your parents; what they said or they felt?

JES - They were worried about me going to the Army. I don't think other than that they were worried much about anything.

JS - You were on the farm so you thought since you were on the farm you wouldn't be drafted.

JES - I was deferred for two years with a farm deferment. I had one other brother and he couldn't take care of everything. I was only sixteen at the time. I was just deferred for two years.

JS Do you remember, did you have to apply for that deferment?

JES - No, I think you had to apply. I think my dad went in to the draft board here in town and they gave me a deferment.

JS - And were most of your friends and the rest of the young men in the community also deferred?

JES - Yeah, my best friend had a deferment too. His mother just had one other younger son. He was deferred about three or four years, I think. He just got in on the tail end of it, I guess.

JS - In 1944 you were drafted? How did you find out about it?

JES - I got a letter saying I was drafted and had to go and to report such and such a time and that was it.

JS - And when you reported, that was for what?

JES - Physical, I went to Fort Leavenworth and I never got to come home. They sent me to Camp Robertson, California.

JS - Did you choose to be in the Army or were you drafted into the Army?

JES - I was drafted into the Army.

JS - Was this your first time away from home?

JES - Yeah.

JS - What was that like?

JES - It was different. I came from a big family with thirteen children. I had never been out of the county.

JS - Did you take a train?

JES - I was on a troop train to California. I know it took us five days. It was a terrible trip. Going through the mountains, the windows got all black with the smoke. It was quite a deal.

JS - Was there anyone else from Montezuma or anyone you knew that went in with you?

JES - No, there were two boys from Ingalls, an Eichenauer, and I forget what the other boy's name was. I was inducted and all the time I was in there I was with a boy from Topeka whose name was Jesus Rodriguez. He was a Spanish boy. We went overseas together and were in the same outfit. When the war was over we were the only two left when the war was over.

JS - Did you keep in touch with him?

JES - No, I never did after I got out.

JS - So, you are on your way to California for basic training?

JES - I never got to finish my basic. They sent us all overseas. I got a three day delay and came home; that is the only time I ever came home. I never got a furlough all the time I was in the Army.

JS - Did you finish basic training?

JES - No, never got to finish that, they just put us on a plane in Santa Barbara and sent us to Kansas City and got three days to come home. I was home about a day really. They put us back on a plane and sent us to New Jersey and we were sent overseas from Camp Kilmer.

JS - What were you thinking when you were flying? That was your first plane ride, too?

JES - Yeah, it was terrible cold, the heater wasn't working. We took our shoes off and stuck our feet in our duffle bags to keep our feet warm.

JS - How many people were on the plane?

JES - Probably twenty, I don't know. We just sat along the sides and we had a bench that we sat on. It was terrible cold.

JS - In what basic training you received, you had learned how to handle a rifle?

JES - Yes, about all we did was walk. We walked twenty miles a day.

JS - You were probably accustomed to a gun growing up on a farm?

JES - I could shoot jackrabbits if I ever did. I always said I could never kill a man. That was strictly against my morals. When we got overseas if we had come face to face, I couldn't have killed a man.

JS - You were aware that the Battle of the Bulge had started and that is why you were going?

JES - Not really, we didn't find out anything with word that was going around camp. I just knew I was going overseas, that's all I knew. This one ship went over and it was a real fast one. There were twelve thousand of us on that ship. It went thirty-eight knots and we changed course every five minutes.

JS - Why would you do that?

JES - So submarines couldn't get lined up on us. Usually in a convoy, one ship goes faster. We went down to South Africa and back up again. It only took us twelve days, at that. It was a long way. They put us on a train at La Havre, France to the channel and sent us right across. Eighteen days after I left the states, I was on the front line.

JS - While you were on the ship were you still training?

JES - No.

JS - What did you do to pass the time?

JES - We talked a lot.

JS - Was it hard going in? How old were you?

JES - I was twenty.

JS - Was it hard to take orders and discipline?

JES - I guess maybe it was, but I didn't realize it. When I got on the front line, I just did what they said because I was trying to stay alive.

JS - You landed in France and you marched to the front?

JES - They took us in trucks.

JS - What did they tell you?

JES - Nothing

JS - What happened, what did you do?

JES - We were going to sleep in a barn one night that was about two miles from the front line. There were seven of us told to go as replacement up to that front line. I was lucky because they bombed that barn that night and they all got hit with shrapnel.

JS - You were replacing people who had lost their lives?

JES - Most people that got hit just got wounded and went to the hospital back in England somewhere. I didn't know that at the time.

JS - Do you remember where this was?

JES - It was in Luxemburg. That is all I know.

JS - Could you describe what a day was like? Would there have been a typical day?

JES - We got up and ate breakfast and just messed around and waited for the trucks that took us to the front line. When we got to the front a lot of Germans got Americans captured and took their clothes. We were on a truck in Belgium and they had these MPs to direct traffic where to go. The Germans took over that job and directed them the wrong way. That is what I remember about that trip. It was terrible cold in the truck bed. It was the last of January.

JS - So, you were carrying a pack?

JES - Yes, I was carrying a little pack.

JS - What would have been in that pack?

JES - I think a gas mask and a blanket. That is all I remember.

JS - What did you do for food?

JES - They gave K-rations, little boxes of food and a can of scrambled eggs and ham and a box of instant coffee and that's what I remember.

JS - And you had K-rations for other meals too?

JES - We lived off the land pretty much. Our supplies didn't always catch up with us. When we got to a little town there was one fellow in the squad that would find food for the rest of us. That was his job.

JS - He would just go into a home and take the food?

JES - Yeah.

JS - How were the people? I know that you were busy fighting, but did you come in contact with the Belgians or the French?

JES - No, we never did.

JS - You just kept moving up?

JES - Yes, we were just in our unit and then we contacted others in the same company. I think there were about fifty to a squad and others in our company were the only ones we got in contact with.

JS - There was a squad leader that knew what you were doing?

JES - He was supposed to.

JS - Did he tell you what you were doing?

JES - He would say, "We've got to move," and we would go. One thing I remember real well was we came to a small town and we got past the first building. The Germans were about a half mile away and they started shooting at us and we had been around there for awhile and our platoon leader said, "We've got to go. Which one of you guys want to go first?" One guy wouldn't go; he was shell shocked. He pointed at me and another guy and said, "You have got to go." I started praying because I thought we would be shot at. You know, we went all the way up there and there wasn't one time they shot at us. I think my prayers and my parents' prayers saved me because there was no other reason. They had been shooting all the time. I got up there to some woods and I saw a machine gun and there were two Germans and they never pulled the trigger.

JS - Did you go into the woods?

JES - There were about 500 Germans there and we took 600 prisoners that day. They just more or less gave up.

JS - When they gave up, how did you know?

JES - We just sent them back to the other area because we didn't take care of the prisoners. We just told them to start walking back and they started back.

JS - They had laid down their guns?

JES - Oh, yeah.

JS - You couldn't speak German to them?

JES - My dad had the bible in German and I had learned enough that I could get by.

JS - Can you describe what happened to you during the Battle of the Bulge and as that came to a conclusion, what did you do then?

JES - We just moved forward. We broke through their front line about 20 times and we got to moving so fast that our supplies didn't catch up with us. We got clear across Austria and we could have taken Prague, but because of that agreement they made, we let the Russians take Prague. Of course we were glad to wait.

JS - You said you prayed a lot and you survived. What did you survive, being shot at?

JES - Oh yes, I have forgotten a lot, but some incidents stand out. One time we had gotten to this town that had a rock quarry. The Germans were across there and they weren't shooting one bullet. We took a peek out and ran as fast as we could down the railroad tracks to the loading docks. They started shooting wooden bullets and quite a few fellows got hit. There would be a terrible boom when they scattered.

JS - Why were they using wooden bullets?

JES - I don't know.

JS - Did they run out of the other kind?

JES - I have no idea.

JS - Any other incidents that you remember? I notice that you got several commendations: the Victory Medal, two Bronze, the Purple Heart, etc.

JES - Well, they were shooting that shrapnel and in those trees it gets a lot more men than in the open. I was lucky I got a little shrapnel in my back is all. The man next to me had big wounds in his legs and I was just lucky. The good Lord looked after me, I think.

JS - You must have had other things to do.

JES - My parents prayed for me everyday and I prayed a lot too. I don't think there is an atheist on the front line.

JS - Were you able to write your parents and receive letters from your parents?

JES - Yes, we would always write at least once a week. Of course, they would always censor them and you couldn't write much what was going on.

JS - What would you tell your parents?

JES - I would tell them I was OK. That is about all I could tell them.

JS - They would write to you. How often did you receive mail?

JES - I don't remember ever getting mail, but I am sure I did.

JS - Some I have talked to said that their parents would send cookies and things. Were your parents able to send things to you?

JES - I don't think so. Our kitchen never caught up with us. They never sent us anything. We either ate K-rations or scrounged off the land. We ate a lot of eggs.

JS - Were you able to get meat and milk?

JES - No, we killed some tame rabbits. A lot of people complained.

JS - How did you cook them? Did you have a little stove?

JES - No, we cooked in people's houses. We would just go in and find food and fix it and eat it. The Germans had been stripped of everything, but they always had some food there so we could take it. One time we got to a place where all that gold and art treasure was stored in a big salt mine. We got to help clean that out. We stayed there two weeks. There was 1200 feet of salt mine to clean that stuff out of.

JS - Can you tell me where it was located? Was it just in Germany?

JES - We were in lots of little towns, I can't remember. I can remember the little town where I was wounded. It was a little burg.

JS - You just happened on this cave?

JES - No, they told those of us from the front line to come and help clean that place out.

JS - What did that mean, to clean it out?

JES - They were trying to take it back where it belonged, I guess. I don't know. It was heavy. You could only carry a little bit. Some said we should take a little bit of it, but it was too heavy to carry around.

JS - So you loaded it on trucks?

JES - We loaded it on trailers and they took it on an elevator and put it on flatbed trucks.

JS - What was it like down in that cave?

JES - It was nice. It was all lit up. The salt looked like rock.

JS - They had prepared that or it was a natural cave?

JES - It was just a natural salt mine.

JS - It was gold that you were loading?

JES - And art treasures, that high priced art that they stole from the Louvre in France and everywhere else. Of course, it was all packed up and leaning against the wall. We just picked it up and put it on the trailer. What they did with it, I have no idea.

JS - What were you thinking when you were doing that?

JES - We were just glad to be off the front line.

JS - Was that before you were wounded?

JES - I don't remember anymore.

JS - How were you wounded, just with shrapnel?

JES - Yeah, the shell burst the tree and the shrapnel came down and hit me in the back.

JS - Did you continue to stay with your unit?

JES - Oh yeah. I went back to have it seen to and they put sulfa powder on it and a big bandage on it and said to go on my way.

JS - You came in '44 and were in Czechoslovakia at the end of the war in '45. How did you get other supplies, like other clothes and things like that? Did they bring them up to you?

JES - Yes, after about two months they brought them and took us to a place to take showers and they gave us new clothes. Boy, we needed it. For us to shave, they had a wine bottle with a wick in it for a light. I didn't know any of that stuff till we got it there.

JS - That doesn't sound very pleasant. When you are fighting a war you can't be concerned about that. What about your unit? Would you say that you were good friends with those men?

JES - We went so many places that we never got very close to anybody.

JS - Were they from all over the United States?

JES - Yes.

JS - What did you learn about people from the different parts of the United States?

JES - I don't think it made much difference. One fellow had been a musician in New York and he said, "When my time comes I am going to go regardless." He was up on his knees and I told him to get down and a machine gun just nearly cut him in half.

JS - Was that hard to see the loss of life?

JES - Yeah it was, but you understand they never knew what happened.

JS - As you went across Germany, were you engaged in fighting?

JES - We were taking villages, the little towns. We would take their guns and the people would all scatter out.

JS - When you were going through the Battle of the Bulge, did you know what was going on with the war effort?

JES - Not really, we just knew we were moving so fast. The first days we would move maybe a thousand yards at night, but later on we got to moving maybe ten miles a day.

JS - So you thought the war was going well for our side?

JES - Oh yeah.

JS - When you got into Czechoslovakia was that any different than Germany?

JES - It was no different.

JS - Where were you when you heard that the war was over?

JES - We were right there by Prague and they told us the war was over.

JS - What did you think?

JES - I was just glad I was still alive.

JS - Did you think you would be able to come home?

JES - We didn't know. We knew some would stay for the occupation. We were afraid we would have to go to Japan. Then that was over too. We got put into occupation there in Germany so I thought I had it made then.

JS - Where were you when you heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Japan?

JES - Back in Germany in a little town where we stayed for a couple of months, that's where I heard about the bomb.

JS - Then, of course, you knew you would not be going to Japan?

JES - Yeah, the war had stopped.

JS - As the Army of occupation, what did you do? You were over there a year.

JES - We went to a place that was a county seat to check records. I didn't check records, but I would go arrest a person if I was told to. I had it made. We had a boat to run around with and had it made.

JS - What kind of people would they be arresting?

JES - They had questionnaires in German for the German Army. They had to fill those out and check them.

JS - To see what they had done during the war?

JES - Yeah, we had a man in camp who could speak seven languages. He went over there to Romania in 1939 and the Germans had captured him and put him in a concentration camp. He was there for seven years.

JS - How did you meet him?

JES - There were six of us GIs together in that town and we had a house with maids. He was there and he had a son that was eighteen years old. He was an interesting man.

JS - You were, then, aware of the concentration camps?

JES - We even came to one during the war once. They still had people in there and it was a terrible sight. We didn't stick around. We went on.

JS - Do you remember which one it was?

JES - I have no idea. It was in Germany. I had no idea which one it was.

JS - The Nazis had fled that by the time you were there.

JES - Oh yeah.

JS - Back to the occupation, were you in the same village the whole time?

JES - No, different ones. First we were in a little town of Amberg, a steel mill town that was. There we lived in a house and had maids and a cook to cook for us. The Army came out with German troops to work, and I would go down there by myself and get a big old SS officer to work for me. I would put him in the truck and bring him back and watch him cut wood. They were glad to get something to eat; they were no problem.

JS - What were your feelings about them?

JES - None.

JS - So you just moved from village to village when you were told?

JES - Yes. The first place I was they had an order for another man, but I guess the officer didn't like him so they said to send John. I was glad because it was a better place anyway. We were in the Alps by the Danube River and it was a

pretty place. We had the Russians with us and one time I did a dumb thing. I had the boat on the Danube River. I went on the other side and never thought about the Russians being over there. They tried to take me to jail and I got out of there and went back across the river and never heard any more about that.

JS - What did people think about the Russians?

JES - All of us were scared of them.

JS - Because of their reputation?

JES - Yeah, before we got through they had road blocks and checked all the papers of people going by. Everybody wanted to stay away from the Russians. They had treated the Russians real bad and they were scared of them.

JS - You had your duties to do, but when you had spare time what did you do? Did you go to other villages?

JES - No, we just stayed right where we were. We would go out with the boat now and then, but not go far.

JS - Did you visit, play cards or what?

JES - I don't think we ever played cards, but we did visit a lot. There were seven of us there and we were pretty good buddies by that time. There wasn't much to do, really.

JS - I know when you get a picture of the soldiers, they are smoking. Did most of them smoke around you?

JES - Oh yeah, I never did smoke. They gave us a carton of cigarettes every week and I would turn around and sell mine for twenty dollars on the black market.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewee: John E Schmidt (JES)

Tape 1 of 1

Side B

JES - I got twenty dollars a month when I first got in and then got ten dollars a month for overseas pay and then dollars for combat pay. By the time I made corporal I think I was getting sixty-some dollars a month.

JS - Did you receive that money while you were there?

JES - Yes, it was cash.

JS - What did you do with that money?

JES - I sent it all back home.

JS - How would you send it home?

JES - With a money order. All you could send home was base pay. You couldn't send anything else home. I left \$900 over there because you couldn't change it from those German marks. Easy come, easy go.

JS - Were most of the men that were with you single or were they married with families? Did you even know that?

JES - Most were single and about half of them were married. One man we called the old man because he was thirty-six and most of us were eighteen or twenty. He had seven children and one day he got pinned down and he got killed out there. I felt bad about that; he had come all that way and just before the war was over he got killed. There were very few people I really got acquainted with.

JS - What about your commanding officers? Did you even really know them?

JES - Not really, we had one Second Lieutenant that we thought was really great because he would never ask us to do anything he wouldn't do. We really liked him, he was transferred, I don't know why.

JS - What unit were you in?

JES - I was in the 357th regiment, 90th division.

JS - All the marching that you did in your short basic training served you well?

JES - I guess.

JS - Were you only shooting the rifle or did you know how to shoot larger guns?

JES - That's all.

JS - That is not infantry?

JES - You didn't shoot much. You didn't want to expose yourself. You don't just go out to shoot. You don't do that.

JS - You said earlier that you were just concerned with remaining alive. What did you learn to help you stay alive?

JES - It just seemed every time we got replacements, the new ones didn't know how to survive. If you knew that you lasted a lot longer. I don't know why that was.

JS - Your training probably helped that.

JES - Yeah, if you exposed yourself to shoot you would get shot at too.

JS - Were you in foxholes?

JES - Yeah, as soon as we would stop we would start digging a hole every time. You might never have to use the hole, but we started digging one.

JS - How deep would that hole be?

JES - We tried to get it deep enough so that when the shrapnel came down we could get a cover on our hole.

JS - What would the cover be made of?

JES - Just logs, brush and dirt.

JS - That is where you ate and slept?

JES - We didn't eat in there. We would just stay a few hours in there and then move on.

JS - How was sleeping?

JES - I don't think I slept much. One night the Germans came through our area and I headed for my hole. One of us would guard so the other could sleep two hours. There were two men in a hole and it was cold.

JS - Weren't you so tired when you hadn't slept through the night?

JES - You just kept going when you had to.

JS - It was just something you needed to get through. You had your clothes and maybe a blanket?

JES - We would sleep on one blanket and cover up with one blanket. That is all we ever had.

JS - That would get wet, wouldn't it?

JES - Yeah, sometimes we lay in water all night. I thought I had never been so cold. It was cold and miserable.

JS - Seems to me like you would have arthritis in your joints.

JES - That's probably why I have arthritis today.

JS - What else do you remember about the period before the occupation that you think people would need to know?

JES - All I knew was my own area. What else went on I don't know. Except for that I have forgotten most of it.

JS - Is there anything else that stands out that you haven't already told? You were in for a year of occupation and at the end of that year you came home?

JES - Yeah.

JS - As you came home on the ship, did you think about your experience and whether your training was sufficient or not?

JES - No, there was nothing I could do about it anyway so I just put it out of my mind.

JS - Were your parents aware that you were coming home?

JES - I think so.

JS - And you came to New York?

JES - Yes, and I was discharged at Fort Sheridan, outside of Chicago. We got on a train and came home.

JS - What was the discharge procedure?

JES - They just gave you a physical, paid your back pay and any mustering out pay and we got on the train and started coming home.

JS - You would have been on the train to Montezuma?

JES - I got off the train in Wichita and changed to the mail train to Dodge. It had only one coach because it was a freight train. One of my buddies picked me up and brought me home.

JS - You could get on any train you wanted to, right?

JES - Just so you could get home. That was your problem.

JS - You didn't have to have a ticket or anything?

JES - No.

JS - Were there a lot of people on the train with you?

JES - There was quite a bunch of us that got discharged and we got on the same train pretty much. We went up to Chicago and got on the train.

JS - When you were coming home, the closer you got, what were you thinking?

JES - I don't remember.

JS - You came home and of course your parents were glad to see you and your twelve brothers and sisters. You were toward the younger.

JES - I was third from the youngest.

JS - Did they all live around here?

JES - Yeah, I have one sister that lives down in Victoria, Texas. It is in south Texas and all the rest of us live around here. Of course, I was gone already.

JS - Did you know when you came back that you would step back into farming?

JES - I figured I would. My brother-in-law talked me into going to Michigan to get work and I couldn't get a job and I was so poor I couldn't come back.

JS - What kind of work were you doing?

JES - Carpenter work.

JS - Building homes and buildings?

JES - Yes.

JS - You stayed in Michigan because you couldn't come home and then what happened?

JES - My brother-in-law talked about going to Arkansas where I had a friend. I came back here to see my folks. My wife wanted to go to Arkansas so we did.

JS - Did you do carpenter work there?

JES - Yeah, and I had a cow-calf operation. I had to carpenter to keep the thing going. When we moved to Arkansas they were real clannish and my friend said he had a friend that was coming and he could do the work. I worked till the people knew my work and then I didn't have to look for a job anymore. Living is cheap in Arkansas because a lot of people are retired. A lot of them said they had been all over the world and this is where they came back to. Taxes are cheap and it is a pretty place to live.

JS - It is a lot different from Montezuma, Kansas.

JES - Sometimes I wish I had stayed there, but you take ninety percent humidity and some heat and it is miserable. There's not a breath of air.

JS - Out here you get a lot of wind. Is there a particular fellow soldier or an officer, or an individual that you have a particular memory about?

JES - Just this Angel Rodriguez was a good buddy of mine and we were together so long.

JS - How long were you with him after you went overseas?

JES - We were together all the time overseas. We were in the same platoon. I didn't get to see him much because he was a radio man and he was with the officers a lot. Our platoon leader was all right, but I didn't get much contact with him.

JS - You were just an infantryman. You didn't get to go into radio or anything?

JES - No.

JS - Did you ask to or want to?

JES - It never entered my head. There wouldn't have been a chance.

JS - When you look back at that experience, what do you think about that whole experience?

JES - I have concluded that war isn't the answer to anything. That was supposed to end all wars and we have been at war ever since.

JS - We fight differently now, don't we?

JES - Yes, the women and children get the brunt end of a war. They get the bad end of it.

JS - Are you from the Mennonite tradition?

JES -Yes.

JS - That is a pacifist tradition? Did it bother you to be drafted?

JES - Oh yeah because I knew I could never kill a man.

JS - Would some of your friends have not gone to war, but been a Conscientious Objector?

JES - Some would be a medic or something like that. At that time I was a young kid running around having a big time and I thought there was no use me trying to get into the objectors. That is what all my brothers did; they did service in camps where they did conservation work.

JS - They would have gone to different places in the United States?

JES - Yes, one was in Lincoln, Nebraska, and in Oregon someplace. Then one was in California working in parks.

JS - Was that for a certain period of time or the duration of the war?

JES - Duration, they were in there for four years. They didn't get paid, but got five dollars a month.

JS - What did your family think? Did they want you to not go?

JES - They didn't want me to go at all.

JS - Were you the only one in your family that had to go? Your younger brother didn't have to?

JES - No.

JS - What would you say to a young person today because now, of course, young women go if they said they were going to join up with the service?

JES - You had better give it a lot of thought. I had a son that went to Viet Nam and he joined the Marines. He got wounded real bad. He got exposed to Agent Orange. He has leukemia now. A doctor gave him two years to live.

JS - That was a tough war too, wasn't it?

JES - Yes, I told him he didn't know what he was getting into. He said, "It can't be that bad." I told him he would find out.

JS - You didn't have much training?

JES - No.

JS - Did you think what you had served you well, once you got there?

JES - You just learn on the job.

JS - Did you receive the medals after you got home?

JES - I got them when I got discharged.

JS - Do you know specifically what they were for?

JES - I just knew the war was over.

JS - You were in the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater, but basically you were in Europe?

JES - In Europe, yes.

JS - You had two Bronze Stars, two Overseas medals, Army of Occupation medal, Good Conduct and Purple Heart medals. The Good Conduct basically is that you did what you were told?

JES - Yes. I never got in trouble, I know.

JS - Once you came home, you moved back to this community and then moved to Michigan and to Arkansas. Did you think about the World War Two experience or talk about it?

JES - I just tried to forget it.

JS - Do you think that was common that most people did that?

JES - I think so. I think most people just tried to forget it.

JS - These tapes will be typed up and researchers will use them to study about how it was in war. What about religion, I know you said you prayed a lot? Was there any formal church service?

JES - There were some. Especially I remember the Jews. They had a service and some went. On the front line, I never heard about any services.

JS - Was there a Chaplain around?

JES - I guess there was, but I never knew where he was.

JS - You just had your own religion. Did you talk with people about religion at all?

JES - I never did.

JS - Do you think that was because that was how people were raised at that time?

JES - I think so.

JS - You just kept your feelings and your thoughts to yourself?

JES - Yes.

JS - When you came back, did that war experience make you more involved politically?

JES - No, it never did.

JS - Can you talk a little about the depression when you were a child?

JES - I was a kid, but I remember my mom made a paste of flour and water and put it around the windows to keep the dirt out of the house.

JS - Because you were on a farm you had sufficient food?

JES - We never were hungry. My mother would make thirteen loaves of bread every other day.

JS - What was it like growing up with thirteen children?

JES - We had a good time. People talk about being bored. We were never bored.

JS - Your house must have been crowded.

JES - My folks would take the mattresses and springs outside and we would sleep, sometimes. We did that for years. We had a lot of company besides.

JS - Where did your parents come from to Montezuma?

JES - Las Alamos, Colorado, is where we lived. My grandparents had homesteaded around here. There was grass for the horses. They put all their stuff on the train and drove the cows and stuff home.

JS - What else do you remember about the '30s? Were you in school at that time?

JES - Yes.

JS - I am assuming it was a one-room school?

JES - No, it was here in town.

JS - You came in town to school?

JES - Yes, they consolidated in 1928 and I started at the new school. I rode the bus all the time to school.

JS - During the '30s school was still in session?

JES - Yes. I missed school six weeks when my dad planted corn in the sand hills and me and my sister chopped it off and made shocks out of it. That was a terrible job, windy and there were a lot of sandburs. That was a bad deal, the hardest I ever worked in my life.

JS - Maybe you didn't work as hard because you were one of the younger ones, right?

JES - I don't think so. If there was work to do, we did it.

JS - What chores would you have been responsible for?

JES - Cows and calves and separated the milk. The school bus came at 8:30 and we had to be ready for school.

JS - You said your mother baked thirteen loaves of bread every other day?

JES - Every other day, it would taste good when we would come home from school with homemade butter. On that hot cornbread, that was really good. We would eat a lot of it when we came home from school.

JS - You had your own meat and milk, cream and eggs because you were on the farm. Times have certainly changed, haven't they? Why did you decide to come back to Montezuma to retire?

JES - My kids insisted because my two daughters lived down by Houston, Texas, so my boys said we should come here.

JS - You still have relatives around here?

JES - Oh yes.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewee: John E Schmidt (JES)

Tape 1 of 1

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