

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Joe Wojtecki

Meyer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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David Meyer: I always start this by remembering my father. So I'll say hi, this is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, of the 95th Infantry. Today is June 9, 2012. We're in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Marriott. And today I have the great pleasure of talking to Mr. Wojtecki, will you say your name?

Joe Wojtecki: Wojtecki.

Meyer: Your first name is?

Wojtecki: Joe.

Meyer: And it's W-O-J-T-E-C?

Wojtecki: T-E-C-K-I

Meyer: And what was your final rank?

Wojtecki: My final rank was sergeant. Equal to a staff sergeant as far as the pay is concerned, but I was a technician third grade.

[brief side conversation with somebody else, Meyer promises to edit pauses]

Meyer: I'm going to read some of this [consulting informational sheet], just because it's so well-written, and it gives some information. Joseph G. Wojtecki Sr., that's you, 33940086.

Wojtecki: RA.

Meyer: RA. What's RA mean? Regular Army. Resident of Salem, Ohio. You entered the U.S. Army in 1944. What's your birth date?

Wojtecki: 9/4/23 [September 4, 1923].

Meyer: So, 9/4/23. And you entered in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. ...

Wojtecki: New Cumberland, yeah.

Meyer: Were you drafted?

Wojtecki: Yes. I had two brothers that volunteered after V-J Day.

Meyer: After Pearl Harbor?

Wojtecki: Pearl Harbor. And I wanted to join with them and I wasn't old enough, and my mother wouldn't sign for me. So I didn't go with them. But they went to the South Pacific, and they came back, and they told my mother that there was no way you're going to let him go. If he's drafted, he'll have to go, but I would take as many deferments as you can. So I worked for a railroad, and I got several deferments, and then I was drafted the first time. And I reenlisted regularly.

Meyer: That's a great story. And New Cumberland – is that where you were living?

Wojtecki: I was living in Greenville, Pennsylvania then.

Meyer: Where were you born?

Wojtecki: I was born in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania.

Meyer: So you're living in Greenville when you get drafted?

[TIME 5:11]

Wojtecki: I was living in Fredonia, Pennsylvania.

Meyer: Oh, in Fredonia. Okay. And you were working for the railroad.

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: What were you doing for the railroad?

Wojtecki: Well I started out as a clerk warehouse, ticket clerk, and then a rate clerk, and then a general clerk, and then a freight agent. I just worked different jobs.

Meyer: Was that sort of working your way up?

Wojtecki: Yeah, yeah.

Meyer: Did you like working for the railroad?

Wojtecki: Oh, yeah.

Meyer: Good job?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: My grandfather used to work for the railroad. Which railroad was that?

Wojtecki: It was the Erie.

Meyer: The Erie. Okay. So you get drafted and you go to New Cumberland. It says you attended basic training, and then you went to ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program]. What did they have you study?

Wojtecki: I was going to go into...

Meyer: Was it engineering?

Wojtecki: No. I was probably going into company clerk, warehouse, battalion headquarters, things like that.

Meyer: Okay, sure. And you were at Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas.

Wojtecki: Yeah. That's where I took my basic. Then came V-E Day, and they stopped the ASTP. So I took the same course over again, and then I went over as a replacement, over to Europe.

Meyer: Over to Europe. And when you went over, you went over on the Queen Mary?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Really? Were there a lot of people on it?

Wojtecki: Oh yeah. Six decks. It was turned over to military.

Meyer: Oh, it was. Was it painted gray?

Wojtecki: So far as I can recall it was more or less gray. It wasn't different colors like they do today. It was more or less gray.

Meyer: So they painted it battleship gray.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Did you get seasick on the way over?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: You did?

Wojtecki: Very. They had me down in No. 6 deck. That's clear down here. So I went from here up to here and then I went like that. Went upstairs, top deck.

Meyer: For meals?

Wojtecki: No, just for fresh air. And of course I was on the rail continually, vomiting.

Meyer: And it took like a week to get over it?

Wojtecki: I never got over it. I could never be a sailor. I just had to hang on the guard rail, and heave over every time I had to. And then I was down in E Deck and I had a friend by the name of Pete Gonzalez. And he'd bring me fruit and things like that. And that's the only thing I could survive on. But I just couldn't stand the movement.

And to beat that, too, when I reenlisted and the division was deactivated, they sent me to Camp Stoneman, and I went to Japan. To occupy. And I was also seasick going there [laughs].

[TIME 10:18]

Meyer: So you never got over being seasick.

Wojtecki: I'd never be a sailor. I had two brothers that were sailors. And I had two brothers who were in the army in the South Pacific. One of those, he was stateside but he did visit on the South Pacific. So, yeah, there were five brothers in the family. And the sixth brother, he was married and had a child, and we had a farm. It was just mother alone. So he stayed home. And he had a job and he also ran the farm at the same time, which is very tough. So I give him credit. Some people may say, no, if we went, he could have, too. But no, we needed him. And he was doing the right thing. In addition to that, he only graduated eighth grade, but he ended up as a shop foreman at one of the plants where he was working. So he'd have to get up early, set up the machines, put them to work, and then keep them happy.

Meyer: Holy cow. And then he had his farm, too.

Wojtecki: Yeah. So, I really give him credit.

Meyer: Sure. What was that brother's name?

Wojtecki: Frank. As far as that's concerned there was Rudolph, William, John, George, Frank, and the baby was Joe, me [laughs].

Meyer: You're the baby. That's right.

Wojtecki: So mom was well represented.

Meyer: She had a lot of work. That's hard bringing up six kids in the Depression.

Wojtecki: My dad worked in Pittsburgh in the steel mills. He got money, he bought a farm out near Union City, Pennsylvania. And then he had an opportunity to buy another farm, so he did. [Pause as Joe Wojtecki's friend Tom closes door to room, which had been opened.] But anyway,

he had a chance to buy another farm, and he got it on a borrowed mortgage, then came the Depression, and we couldn't make payments, and then we had some sheriff's sales. They sold a bunch of our cattle, and so on and so forth. Then we couldn't even handle that. So we lost the two farms.

Meyer: Oh, you lost the two farms.

Wojtecki: So then we started from nothing. After that loss. That he had worked so hard for, for so long. So anyway, but there were others in the same fix that we were. You recall reading about the Depression.

Meyer: About the Depression, yes. But you just made it come clear. Other people have talked about how hard it was. But you hear about people losing stocks and things. But you don't hear about people—but right there you showed how hard your father worked for everything.

Wojtecki: They had Liberty bonds to help finance the war, World War I. Okay? Dad bought into that. But we had to turn them in so that we could have some kind of living, and we only got a few cents on the other. We just did what we could to survive, and have something to eat, you know? So all that was lost, also.

[TIME 15:40]

Meyer: So everything's lost. You had to start out from scratch.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: How young? So you're a young boy when your father loses the farm?

Wojtecki: Yeah. We moved to the farm about I think 1910. No, wait a minute –

Meyer: Nineteen-thirty?

Wojtecki: Yeah, about 1910.

Meyer: Okay. So he lost the farm during the Depression, right? You said that your brothers who came back from the Pacific told everyone not to let you go into the service.

Wojtecki: No way [laughs].

Meyer: No way. Because they saw what was happening over there. And a whole different war.

Wojtecki: Yeah. The two brothers were in the infantry, and two brothers were navy. And one was navy exclusive and the other was partly stateside, but he also visited the South Pacific.

Meyer: Now you go on the Queen Mary and you're going over to England, and you're very sick. Then you get to England – ?

Wojtecki: We landed in Glasgow, Scotland, and then we traveled to England. And we took the streetcars, or whatever you call them, down to Southampton, then we got on boats again, to Le Havre, see. There I was on water again, and sick again, and I was in the – what do you call...

Meyer: The LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks]? Like the Higgins things? Or the Liberty ships? Which ones? The things with the front that goes down?

Wojtecki: No, that was ahead of us.

Meyer: Oh, that was ahead of you. That's going to happen.

Wojtecki: Yeah. Yeah. We lost a lot of people on the beaches and of course the marines made a place for us to land, but we lost a lot of them in the water. And they got together at different places, different times, much later on. But we lost a lot of people.

Meyer: So you get to Le Havre, and what happened?

Wojtecki: They put us on boxcars, what they call...

Meyer: Forty-and-eights?

Wojtecki: Yeah – 40?

Meyer: Forty-and-eights.

Wojtecki: Forty soldiers for eight horses.

Meyer: Did you have to stand up?

Wojtecki: Somehow I managed to find a place to rest [laughing]. But anyway, then we got within a short distance of Metz, and I could hear the artillery, and so on and so forth. And that's when I joined them. But--

Meyer: Is that when you joined the 95th?

Wojtecki: That's when I joined the 95th. But Company I, the 95th, had already taken Metz. Captured, I'd say.

[TIME 20:00]

Meyer: Because it says you go in as a replacement, and Company I, 378th, right? Which is Dick Seatman's (PH) company, isn't it?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So it's after November 21st, because they've already taken Metz.

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Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So you go in – are they in Metz, or are they beyond Metz?

Wojtecki: They were at Metz whenever I joined them. Then they moved on into Northern France, Central Europe, Rhineland, and so on.

Meyer: But you go into Ensdorf?

Wojtecki: Ensdorf, that was Central Europe. And that's where I got my Purple Heart.

Meyer: What happened? Hold on just a second, your son, who's the best son in the world, is going to close the door again.

Wojtecki: He's not my son; he's just a good friend. A very good friend.

Meyer: He is a very good friend. What's his name?

Wojtecki: Tom Costa.

Meyer: He is a very good friend. So what happened at Ensdorf?

Wojtecki: At Ensdorf, well after...

Meyer: Remember the clothes? Ensdorf.

Wojtecki: After they took Metz I joined them in Central Europe. And when I got there -- when I got to Europe, they told me to throw my gas mask on a pile. I was not to take it with me. Okay, when I got to Ensdorf I was with phosphorous gas that got me so I couldn't breathe. [more conversation about closing door] So that's what happened. I couldn't breathe. And I was a danger to those around me because I couldn't...

Meyer: That's okay. First I wanted to ask you, when you join in and you're a replacement, you don't know anyone, do you?

Wojtecki: No.

Meyer: Are people friendly to you?

Wojtecki: Oh, yes. Yes. You adopt the family immediately.

Meyer: You adopt the family immediately.

Wojtecki: Yeah. Yeah. And after that, you're concerned with what happens to each and every one of them. It's just like family.

Meyer: So it's just like family.

Wojtecki: Yeah. Yeah.

Meyer: And you're used to a pretty big family. So was it easy for you to feel close to them?

Wojtecki: Yes. Very.

Meyer: Were you a rifleman? What was your job?

Wojtecki: How's that again?

Meyer: When you were with Company I, what was your job? Were you a rifleman as a replacement?

Wojtecki: I was a rifleman. Yeah. I earned the combat infantry badge while I was there. I was a private, then private first class.

Meyer: So you start out as private, then you make private first class.

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: So when you're injured, you're injured at Ensdorf with phosphorous gas?

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: Are you shot, too? Do you have any bleeding?

Wojtecki: No. Phosphorous gas is what did me in. But I got plenty of bleeding from rubble, bricks and everything that fall on you, you know. But it isn't shrapnel or anything like that. But you bleed.

[TIME 25:02]

Meyer: Of course you do. That's great to know. You create a good picture when you speak. People don't talk about falling down and having rubble and bricks falling on them.

Wojtecki: Yeah. And I was marching in mud up to my knees.

Meyer: Up to your knees.

Wojtecki: And a lot of these people that were going on forced marches to get to someplace, they would have to pick them up with jeeps. And to lighten their load they would drop their ammo. And I would pick it up. Sooner or later we needed that ammo, you know? So I don't know – I don't want to make it sound like a hero.

Meyer: No, no, no. The important thing is, I know a lot of people are afraid, they don't want to make themselves sound like a hero, because they'll say the heroes are the one who died.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: What we're concerned about, the important thing is just to talk about what you saw, what you smelled, what you thought – everything like that.

Wojtecki: One of the worst things that could happen is run out of ammunition, and then you've got nothing.

Meyer: So that's one of the reasons you keep picking up ammo.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So you pick it up for other people, you pick it up for yourself. You want to make sure that everybody--

Wojtecki: Yeah. For a while I carried what they called the BAR, Browning Automatic Rifle. It had the extra power, you know. And so I carried it for a while. [laughs] But sometimes, as short as I was, I'd have to drag the stock on the ground. But anyway, also, when I wasn't, I carried the ammo box for the BAR man, you see. But the enemy was always looking for the one with the extra power, and they didn't usually last very long.

Meyer: The BAR people? They didn't last long?

Wojtecki: No, because they were singled out. Because they had the extra power, and they'd pick 'em out. So I was in that situation for a while.

Meyer: Do you remember a time when you felt afraid?

Wojtecki: The first time that I engaged the enemy. And all the while I was engaged, I was afraid.

Meyer: You were afraid. What was the first time?

Wojtecki: The first time?

Meyer: Yes.

Wojtecki: Right after I joined I Company at Metz.

Meyer: Even though Metz, the battle is over, as soon as you join I Company there's still a lot of resistance?

Wojtecki: Oh, yes. We had to go through Central Europe, Rhineland, Northern France, and so on. So there were three battle areas. I got three battle stars.

Meyer: Three battle stars. So you had Lorraine, I know you probably had Lorraine battle star, and then...

Wojtecki: What it was -- the Lorraine-Argonne area in Belgium, was in Northern France. But I was in Northern France, Central Europe, and Rhineland. So I got three battle stars.

Meyer: Three battle stars. Oh my gosh. Let me ask you, because I know you're injured in Emsdorf on December 10, 1944. That's when you got gassed. Does that make your lungs weak forever?

Wojtecki: No. Fortunately I needed to get out of that area, so they took me to a field hospital. And I was there for I think roughly two weeks, and then I was returned to I Company.

Meyer: Did you spend Christmas in the field hospital? Or were you back?

[TIME 30:08]

Wojtecki: I was back with the outfit for Christmas.

Meyer: Were you glad to be back?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Because they're your buddies?

Wojtecki: They're all buddies. [laughs]

Meyer: They all are buddies. I know some people got a little Christmas card or little memento from General Patton. Did you get any of that?

Wojtecki: Oh, yes. I got them at home. I wish I could have brought them with me, but I didn't.

Meyer: So you got a little card from General Patton.

Wojtecki: General Patton, and Eisenhower. And, let me see, who else? And Twaddle.

Meyer: And Twaddle. What did you think of your commanding officers?

Wojtecki: I had a lot of respect for all of them. I don't quite agree with Patton, the way he treated the person that they made the movie about. I don't, I mean, he was all soldier. We're all not, all of us are not soldiers. We can be soldiers for a while. But he was from beginning to end, so I think the individual was treated unfairly.

Meyer: That Patton was treated unfairly in the movie? Or that he treated you guys unfairly?

Wojtecki: He treated that one individual that the movie was made about unfairly.

Meyer: Oh, the one that he slapped?

Wojtecki: Yeah. Like I say, he was all military. But we can be in war part-time. But we don't need to be full-time, like he was.

Meyer: What did you do to, because as you said, you're always a little nervous, always looking around. Did you have a lucky charm or anything that you carried? Do you have a prayer you said? Or what did you do?

Wojtecki: I had a [inaudible] (CK) Bible, just about, smaller than this, with a metal plate. I carried it over here.

Meyer: You carried it over your heart?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: A small Bible with a metal plate, you carried it over your heart. That was smart.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Because I see after that, the 378th was sent to Liege, Belgium, to relieve troops at Hurtgen Forest. Were you part of that? Did you rejoin the 378th after the phosphorus, you rejoined them at Christmas.

Wojtecki: Yeah. As it shows there, we had a forced — I was going to say forced march, but no, they put us in trucks and they drove us up to Belgium. But we were going to be replacements for those that were in the Bulge. But their counterattack was not successful, and they held it. So they didn't need us. So then we went back down to —.

Meyer: Central Europe?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So you go back to where you were before?

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: It says while you were stationed in Europe you served under General Montgomery. Because for a little bit you get transferred to British Army, don't you?

Wojtecki: I was under his command for a short time.

Meyer: General Patton, US Third Army; General Eisenhower, and General Twaddle, 95th Infantry Division. So do you go with him through the Ruhr Pocket, through Krefeld, and Hamm, and Dusseldorf, and all those?

Wojtecki: Oh yes.

Meyer: Do you have any memories from those times?

Wojtecki: Just rubble. Just plain rubble.

Meyer: Everything's rubble.

Wojtecki: Yeah. What happened is when I joined the 95th at Metz and we went down into Central Europe, we moved from pillbox to pillbox by way of, we used explosives to get from one house to the other, so that we could cover, and use our bazookas and artillery, and charges, to eliminate them.

[TIME 36:04]

Meyer: So you would go house to house. Would you mouse-hole, they used to call it, blow a hole between the houses, through the joint walls and then you climbed through?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: That's one of the things you did?

Wojtecki: Pardon?

Meyer: Did you do any mouse-holing, where you take the bazooka and you blow the hole in the wall between the two houses and you crawl through?

Wojtecki: Right.

Meyer: Sure. And you couldn't go out on the street easily because the Germans were on the other side.

Wojtecki: Right. So then when we get to the, where the pillboxes were, we could lay charges and use the bazookas and whatever else we had in order to eliminate them. So they're not functional.

Meyer: Did you do any of that? Lay charges?

Wojtecki: Pardon?

Meyer: Did you ever use the bazooka?

Wojtecki: Bazooka? Yeah, yeah. It was just now and then, routine, you know.

Meyer: It was just routine?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Did it have much of a kick?

Wojtecki: [laughs] Sort of, yeah. It was over your shoulder, it was over the shoulder, not at the shoulder.

Meyer: Was there a loop that went on the shoulder, or did you just hold it on your shoulder?

Wojtecki: Hold it on the shoulder.

Meyer: Hold it on the shoulder, and you aim?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: This is Mr. Wojtecki [introducing a woman]. This is Kay.

Kay Grosinske: Hi, I'm Kay Grosinske. My dad was in the 378th. And what about you?

Wojtecki: I remember you from the last time.

Grosinske: You do? Oh, I like being remembered.

Wojtecki: We sat at the same dinner table.

Grosinske: We did, actually, now that I see your face.

Wojtecki: Sure we did. Sure we did.

Meyer: Mr. Wojtecki is from 378th, Company I.

Grosinske: Yes. Because I was trying to get his name right. It's one of those [tricky] ones.

Wojtecki: Toughie.

Grosinske: Yeah, like mine, a little crazy. So, Wojtecki. Did I say that right?

Wojtecki: Let me have a good look here.

Grosinske: Grosinske. It's hard to read on this, but it's Grow-ZIN-ski. Kay is so much easier.

Wojtecki: It's hard to see through this [nametag covering].

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Grosinske: For me, too. It didn't turn out quite as well. Well, I'm going to leave you guys to this. And go back in and keep talking.

Meyer: And what time is it?

Grosinske: It is 4:30

Wojtecki: We'll see you at supper. ...

Grosinske: See you at supper.

Meyer: What time is supper?

Grosinske: The cocktails are at six, and the dinner's at 6:30. And General Archer said that some people did mention to him it wasn't enough time to get drunk, but that's okay.

Meyer: Well then you have to work on it.

Grosinske: Yeah, I know. And Bob Baden's not here to buy me a drink this year. I'm just so disappointed.

Meyer: I'll buy you a drink.

Grosinske: You'll buy me a drink! Oh!

Meyer: Just one drink. That's one drink. Then you have to bounce from person to person.

Grosinske: I keep bouncing.

Meyer: Okay. So I was going to ask you—

Wojtecki: I want to emphasize I didn't do a whole lot of this bazooka thing. I was mainly a rifleman and BAR.

Meyer: BAR – did you set it up with a tripod?

Wojtecki: Yeah. It was more of a bipod.

Meyer: Oh, yeah, that's right. It's a bipod. And did it take two people to carry the gun?

Wojtecki: No. Two people. One to carry the ammo, the other to carry the gun.

Meyer: Was the ammo on a belt?

Wojtecki: The ammo was in a—

Meyer: Like a canister?

Wojtecki: The ammo was in a container, canister. Yeah. But it was sort of continuous, yeah. You could just roll right out of it.

[TIME 40:17]

Meyer: They rolled right out of it. So when you carried the ammo, were there a couple of canisters in there? Or how many canisters would you carry?

Wojtecki: Well the canister contained all of the ammo.

Meyer: Oh, I got you. Did you fire it? As a rifleman, you'd fire the BAR.

Wojtecki: Yeah, we used the BAR.

Meyer: When you're firing it, when you're using it, do you use it under your own discretion, or does someone command you to do it?

Wojtecki: When we're going, one time we were overtaking a military post, see, and there were all kinds of people there, and they were coming back—

Meyer: They're coming toward you?

Wojtecki: Towards us with the white flags.

Meyer: They were surrendering, yes.

Wojtecki: So then we were taking prisoners and sending them back, and we were continuing. But we were going with marching fire, so we could shoot from down here. We didn't have to zero in on anything special. It was just sweeping across the area.

Meyer: You could do march and fire with the BAR?

Wojtecki: Oh yeah.

Meyer: Oh, you could. So you didn't have to set it down and put down the bipod.

Wojtecki: Didn't have to.

Meyer: So it was light enough that you could still do that.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So the ammunition man would be responsible for giving the BAR man the ammunition, keeping him supplied, and he could just march and fire. See Mr. Wojtecki, I've been talking to the 95th since 2004. You're the first person to give me a good description of march and fire with a BAR. So I just wanted to tell you that your descriptions are great. Thank you. And see, that's the thing. When people think oh, I don't want to talk, because they don't want to make themselves out like a hero, you're not. You're just telling what you did. That's all.

Wojtecki: That's good. That's the way it needs to be. I don't want it coming out any different.

Meyer: No. I think what happens is I think sometimes after the war because people didn't talk, because their kids grew up and they didn't know. And it's good that this is being remembered. So you're walking across, I know that the 95th came across at least one Russian prisoner camp.

Wojtecki: I Company came across one, but the 379th came across at least one other, 379.

Meyer: Oh, they did?

Wojtecki: Yeah. And when you get a chance to watch that movie—

Meyer: *Hell is for Heroes*, yes.

Wojtecki: Watch it closely to see what they have to say to that. So I'm saying this. We had an officer that was injured, so we treated the injury, and then we arrested him and made him a captive. He was a general. And he was prosecuted.

Meyer: Was that [Franz] von Papen?

Wojtecki: Pardon?

Meyer: Was that von Papen? The big one?

Wojtecki: That was one, but there was another one.

Meyer: Von Papen was prosecuted in the Nuremberg Trial.

Wojtecki: Yeah. And this other one, it will show up in there, I can't think of the name. But we immediately arrested him and we held him for trial.

Meyer: Do you remember seeing him?

Wojtecki: I don't remember seeing him. I remember reading about him.

[TIME 45:07]

Meyer: Reading about him. But you remember seeing the Russian prisoners of war that you liberated.

Wojtecki: Ah...

Meyer: How about displaced persons? Did you see any of those, the DPs?

Wojtecki: Yeah [laughs]. They would be in these bomb shelters. And they would come out at night and they would urinate—

Meyer: And defecate?

Wojtecki: Defecate, and expel their air, and so on and so forth [laughs]. Just a routine thing at night before they'd go back in.

Meyer: The bomb shelters. Speaking of which, sometimes people talk about this. But I was going to ask you, were you ever in a foxhole?

Wojtecki: Pardon?

Meyer: Foxhole. Were you ever in foxholes?

Wojtecki: Oh yeah. Whenever we'd go, whenever we'd move, when we'd have to stop, we'd start digging. Had to have a little bit of a depression at least to keep us. And go as far as we could, and then stop and get the rest for the night.

Another thing, too while we're at it. There were times whenever a truck would bring the bedrolls up to us. We'd be able to pick one out. Sometimes you'd get your own. Most of the time you wouldn't get your own, you just took one.

Meyer: you just took a foxhole that was already there?

Wojtecki: Took a bedroll.

Meyer: Really?!

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: You'd just take a bedroll that was—

Wojtecki: Yeah. You didn't have time, didn't have time to sort through a bunch of stuff. You had to stop and get some rest. Now and then you could recognize yours, but most of the time you couldn't, you'd just take one.

Meyer: As for you, you mentioned the displaced persons taking care of their bodily functions. What did you do in the foxhole? Did you have to climb out, did you go in your helmet?

Wojtecki: Oh, you used your helmet for your bath when you had a chance. And you had a shovel on your back, you made a depression when you had to eliminate, and then you had to cover it up. But you had the shovel.

Meyer: So you had a shovel on your back so you could do it and cover it up.

Wojtecki: There was a shovel, an extra blanket, and so on.

Meyer: Do you remember where you were on V-E Day, when Germany surrendered?

Wojtecki: Yeah, I was occupying up in – where was it – up around Bremen.

Meyer: Yes, up around Bremen. I think there was a submarine base or something around there. Were you near that?

Wojtecki: That's where it ended.

Meyer: That's where it ended.

Wojtecki: We were occupying.

Meyer: Did you celebrate?

Wojtecki: Not necessarily at that time. But while we were there our troops ran across a cache of spirits, so they celebrated. But it wasn't necessarily the end of the war [laughs]. But they celebrated so much that when it was time to relieve me from my post, nobody showed up. Okay? So they celebrated all right.

Meyer: So they celebrated, all right. They celebrated, they left you hanging.

Wojtecki: At my expense.

Meyer: At your expense.

Wojtecki: They were having a good time [laughs].

[TIME 50:25]

Meyer: So after the European War ends, you're serving briefly as part of the occupation forces in the Rhineland area.

Wojtecki: We mentioned Bremen, yeah, that was the Rhineland area.

Meyer: Are you guarding German prisoners? Or what are you doing as occupation force?

Wojtecki: The occupation? Just our presence. Just our presence.

Meyer: Just your presence is enough. How were the German people? Were they glad the war was over? Did they treat you with hostility?

Wojtecki: They were okay. They were okay. They accepted the defeat, and that was it. We cleaned out the pockets where there was resistance, but that was the end of it.

Meyer: So even after the surrender there were still sort of pockets of resistance?

Wojtecki: Yeah, but it didn't take long to finish it.

Meyer: Somebody told me there's a difference between the German soldier and the SS. That the SS was more fanatical. Did you ever run into any SS?

Wojtecki: Not that I recognized. But overall the Germans that I connected with, they were civilian soldiers.

Meyer: Like you.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Not like Patton. Not a professional soldier. Civilian soldiers. So they just got pulled into it.

Wojtecki: Yeah. And they were old. I don't know, they would go anywhere from 40 to 65, something like that. But they wore uniforms. But they were that desperate for manpower.

Meyer: Did you see any of the young kids, the wolfpacks?

Wojtecki: I saw some, not many.

Meyer: I'd heard that I think it was 378th Company G, had a sergeant, that came up right the week before the war ends, I think, they came up upon—no, the month before the war ends, they came upon a wolfpack. And the man relieved these kids and said, "Okay, the war's over for you." They went around the corner. One of the kids got the gun and killed the sergeant. John Komp was telling me this story. He said about a couple weeks later headquarters wrote to Company G. They said how come everyone else is sending back prisoners, but not Company G? And he said and then Company G starts sending back prisoners. But for about two weeks, everyone they came up to, they just got rid of.

Wojtecki: Yeah. Yeah.

Meyer: So you heard of things like that?

Wojtecki: No. I'm hearing it for the first time from you. But I can understand why Company G was doing what they did.

Meyer: You know, because as you said, the camaraderie, your buddy. Your buddy gives someone a break and then they get killed.

Wojtecki: No. Not good. Not good.

Meyer: Now in this first part of the war, who was the closest person to you? Who was most important to you?

Wojtecki: Well I had this friend, Pete Gonzales, he was my friend through everything.

Meyer: Was he a rifleman, too?

Wojtecki: Yeah. He was a private first class.

Meyer: Where was he from?

Wojtecki: Texas. No, California. I'm forgetting the name of the place, though. I've got the address at home.

Meyer: Is Pete Gonzales still alive?

Wojtecki: No.

Meyer: I'm sorry.

[TIME 55:18]

Wojtecki: He passed away.

Meyer: He passed away. But did you stay in touch with him after the war?

Wojtecki: Oh, yes. Yeah.

Meyer: Did you ever see him after the war?

Wojtecki: Much. We visited very often.

Meyer: Do you live in Pennsylvania now? Where do you live?

Wojtecki: I live in Salem, Ohio.

Meyer: In Salem, Ohio. That's right. I grew up in Hamilton, Ohio. I'm from Hamilton, Ohio. And my wife is from Cleveland. So when I come back in November, or when I visit Cleveland around Christmas, I'll call you and then we'll talk some more.

Wojtecki: Good.

Meyer: Because I'll watch this. I'll have time to watch this. I was going to ask you, so when did you return to Boston? It says you return to Boston.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Is that in 1945? Or you went to 1946 when you return to Boston?

Wojtecki: Forty-five.

Meyer: Forty-five. Is the war still on?

Wojtecki: The war's still on.

Meyer: In Japan?

Wojtecki: In Japan. And while we're at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, it ended. That's where we were deactivated, and then we were sent to Camp Atterbury.

Meyer: Atterbury, which is in?

Wojtecki: Indiana.

Meyer: Indiana. But when you were in Camp Shelby, they started jungle training for you?

Wojtecki: Yes. We were going to start the jungle training. We never got to it. Didn't have to.

Meyer: So when the bomb dropped you were happy?

Wojtecki: Yep.

Meyer: Did you celebrate?

Wojtecki: Yes. Oh, Harry Truman was the man.

Meyer: Harry Truman was the man!

Wojtecki: Yep.

Meyer: Were you at Camp Shelby when the war ended in September, when they signed the treat?

Wojtecki: Yeah, we were there.

Meyer: What happened that night? Was there a party?

Wojtecki: Jubilance.

Meyer: Jubilance. So it says at Shelby you're there when the bombings ended the war. You're sent to Camp Atterbury, and you're assigned the duty of the NCO in charge of army service separation center. You're in charge of sixty people.

Wojtecki: Yeah, civilian and military.

Meyer: And you're still PFC. You're a PFC.

Wojtecki: Well, that's where I got my rank.

Meyer: You earned the rank of T3, noncommissioned administrative officer, which is the same thing equal to a sergeant?

Wojtecki: Same pay as a staff sergeant.

Meyer: As a staff sergeant. Okay. So you're in charge of army service separation. Is that where people come up to you?

Wojtecki: Yeah. We discharged officers. Officers separation center.

Meyer: Okay. So you have all these officers coming up to a T3, and they better be good to you or else.

Wojtecki: [laughs] It's just paperwork.

Meyer: Oh, so you're just processing the papers.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: And there's a lot of people that you're processing. Because you're processing the officers, you're processing a lot of people.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: So that's why you have sixty. It also says, so you're doing that at Camp Atterbury. Then it says from Camp Atterbury, you're sent to Camp Stoneman, California. And then--

Wojtecki: Overseas to occupy Japan. Yokohama.

Meyer: Yokohama. What does Japan look like?

Wojtecki: It was pretty well torn down from the bombs. However, they were getting back toward normal. But as far as the atmosphere was concerned, it was considered safe for us to be there after the bomb.

[TIME 1:00:20]

Meyer: So the Japanese civilians, did they give you any trouble?

Wojtecki: No. No trouble at all.

Meyer: And did you see any Japanese military that were prisoners? The old Japanese Army, what happened to it?

Wojtecki: I saw more American prisoners. We had a prison there for Americans.

Meyer: You mean for the Americans that misbehaved?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: You mean the Americans had a prison for the Americans.

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: Really?

Wojtecki: Yes [laughs].

Meyer: Would they loot, or would they get drunk? What would the Americans do?

Wojtecki: Oh, everything including murder. Yeah. My job was to process these on a regular basis to see that none of them were lost in the process and then dropped between the—

Meyer: Drop between the cracks.

Wojtecki: Cracks.

Meyer: So you're assigned to the Judge Advocate Section of headquarters, Eighth Army, processing prisoner records. So you're again dealing with paperwork.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: And just making sure everything is filed?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Do you like that sort of work?

Wojtecki: Not necessarily, but I'd been doing it all my life for the railroad and everything else.

Meyer: Sure. The same sort of job. How long were you in Japan?

Wojtecki: I was there – my discharge would show it.

Meyer: So were you discharged from Camp Stoneman or from Japan?

Wojtecki: I was discharged from Camp Stoneman, but they never gave me credit for having occupied.

Meyer: They never gave you credit?

Wojtecki: No. So I've been working with my son Joe, and he's working with the Governor Kasich of Ohio to assign somebody to check that out for me, because I think I'm entitled to it and I think he can help me.

Meyer: You know what, where I live now, I live in Bermuda, the island of Bermuda. And some of their veterans didn't see any pension until 2007. That's a long time. The World War II veterans. Some of them got it right away, but a lot of them didn't get pension until 2007. So that is sixty-some years.

Wojtecki: Too long.

Meyer: Much too long. And the government saved a heck of a lot of money.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: I'm glad someone is fighting for you. You should get what you deserve. So you have three campaign medals. The EAME Theater medal. And you have three Bronze Stars.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Is the Bronze Star for valor?

Wojtecki: Bronze Stars is for the campaigns.

Meyer: And you got the Purple Heart for the phosphorous?

Wojtecki: Phosphorous.

Meyer: For the phosphorous. And your other medals. And did you meet your wife Mabel after the war?

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Did you meet her in Ohio?

Meyer: No, not yet. I'm going to say the question to you. One more deep breath. One more deep breath. Okay, let it go. And Mr. Wojtecki, open your eyes, and tell me the first thing you think of.

Wojtecki: I think of a blue sky, clouds, and sun. And purple sky, because the clouds are covering the sun. ...

Meyer: That's great. That's great. People say something like that. Sometimes it takes, sometimes it doesn't. Do you have anything else you want to say right now? Any other stories come to mind?

Wojtecki: I'm just about storied out. I'm hungry!

Meyer: I thought you were. So let me just finish up. This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, of the 95th Infantry. And today I've had the great pleasure of talking to—

Wojtecki: Did you say 79?

Meyer: 379th, he was.

Wojtecki: 378

Meyer: No, my father.

Wojtecki: Oh.

Meyer: And I've had the great pleasure of talking to, Mr. Wojtecki, will you say your name again?

Wojtecki: Joe Wojtecki.

Meyer: Joe Wojtecki, 378th, Company I, 95th Infantry. And at the end of your service you were Eighth Army headquarters.

Wojtecki: Yes.

Meyer: And you finally left the service May 23, 1947.

Wojtecki: Yeah.

Meyer: Okay, Mr. Wojtecki, you did a great job.

[TIME 1:10:35]
[End Tape]