William E. Wall oral history interview

Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army
World War II – Pacific Theater

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Abstract: William E. Wall shares his experience in the infantry and New Guinea during World War II. Wall discusses the challenges early in his Army life, primarily managing mess hall and training demands. He talks about the role of truck companies and supplying infantry units in New Guinea. Wall also highlights occasional racial and class tensions among different platoons in the Pacific. The author describes the rough terrain and frequent hostile breeches that complicated the Army efforts to retake Maffin Bay. He conveys his appreciation for the Army to promote proactive, efficient training strategies and facilitate national unity.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	Cinebar Productions
Abstract by:	Aaron Rodriguez, VWM Volunteer

Interview Transcript:

Interviewer: Okay, first thing we'll do is have you spell your name, last name first.

Wall: W-A-L-L, Wall. And my first name is William, W-I-L-L-I-A-M. But everybody calls me Bill.

Interviewer: Okay, next we'll do branch of service rank serial number.

Wall: You want to know at the end or when?

Interviewer: At the end.

Wall: Well, I was in the Army, and I retired in 1969. I was lieutenant colonel.

Interviewer: Okay, let's start at the very beginning and then go on to the end. We'll go back to the very beginning. Tell me when you joined up, why you joined up, why the army, what your parents said, what was going on at the time?

Wall: Well, when the Pearl Harbor happened, most of us knew that we would be going into the Army. Now, I can't tell you exact dates. Mostly, I can tell you pretty close to some of it. And I was going to school at the University of Kentucky. I was in law school, and I thought that, well, as soon as this semester is finished, I'll get out of school and be ready to go in the Army. Now, they had assigned each one of us a draft number. Now, I don't remember how that was, but I remember I had a draft number. And it came, probably, December, January school semester ended, and I didn't go back to school. And on the 5th of April of 1942, I didn't... I had gone through a physical already. I already had the physical, but I knew that my number had been come through. And I don't remember how I knew this, being so long ago, but I got up in the morning early in the morning, and I walked up to the draft board. I lived in a small town and I walked in and the woman at the draft board knew me and she said, “What are you doing here?” And I said, “Well, my number came up.” And she said, “Well, you're not...” said. “You've got a deferment.” And I don't remember what the deferment was 60 days or six months. I don't remember which it was, but I hadn’t put it in.

I don't know where it came, and I don't know yet where it came from. And the woman said, “You can go back home and come back, you know, when this period was up.” I said, “Well, I'm already here.” I said, “I'll just go ahead and go in.” So, she said, “That's good.” She said, “I'll put you in charge of two busloads of people leaving.” And I don't remember whether she told us or not. But anyway, we were going to the main recruiting station in Cincinnati and then come back to Fort Thomas, Kentucky. And I never will forget, the woman gave me a mess card. She said, “You won't have anything to do,” and said, “Just take care of the...” said, “you will stop at Renfro Valley,” which was part way through there, and said, “everybody will eat,” and said, “you hand them the mess tickets.” And I said, “Okay.” So, we stop at Renfro Valley, the two busloads, and we get out and they feed us all. And so, I go up to give the woman a card for the or pay for whatever it was. And the cashier said, “Well, I counted 76 people. It was only 75 on this card.” I said, “If that card sisters only 75, there's only 75 of us.” And she said, “Well, I know there's 76.” And I said, “Well,” of course I wasn't going to pay that off, but I said, “I know there's 75.” And she said, “Okay, hand it to me.” So, years later, I got to thinking, I was number 76. I hadn't thought about that, really, at the time, and didn't think about it for many years.

But I went up to on to Cincinnati and we stayed there that night, and I don't remember whether we got our issue of clothing there, or we went across the river the next day to Fort Thomas, which was a very small post outside of Covington, Kentucky. I think it had a, one company of infantry in the post, very small post... not there anymore, of course. And we go down there and they're not going to give us any training. They give us their uniforms and they made us wade through... whether they gave the uniform there or we already had them, I don't remember this. But anyway, we had the old GI shoes, and they waded us through water to wet these shoes down, so it fit your feet. I remember that. And it worked. It actually worked. So, the guy, they had a, I think he was a corporal, probably, and he was trying to occupy our time more than anything. And he had us outside teaching left face and right face and about face and so forth. Of course, we had too many. He couldn't do it. So, I had learned how to do this in the Boy Scouts, I could do right face and left face and so forth and so on.

I'd been in the Boy Scouts for many years, and so he saw that I could do it. And so, he divided all of these people up into two groups. And he said, “You take one bunch and teach them how to do left face and right face and about face.” And he said, “I'll take the other bunch.” So, we stayed there for a couple of days, two or three days. It wasn't very long. And so, they we got up one day, and they loaded us onto trains, and we didn't know where we were going, but we were on a troop train. And this was something that people absolutely cannot believe, now. We get on this troop train, and if you remember, the old sleeping car had a lower bunk and an upper bunk, and the lower bunk was much bigger than the upper bunk, still might be, I don't know. I've been on a train many, many years, but we get ready to go to bed that night. The train had gone off. We get ready to go to sleep that night and they assign two men to the bottom bunk. They slept together. One guy slept in the top bunk. Well, if you were lucky, you got to sleep in the top bunk, and the other people got to sleep, two of them, in the lower bunk.

And it didn't matter whether you knew the guy or not, you wouldn't have slept together in that lower bunk. And we arrived in at, at Camp Bowie, Texas. It took about three or four days to make the trip. And each unit at that time, what they later on called individual, I guess, yeah, individual basic training. They gave the basic training in the units, not like they do now where they give basic training at Fort Benning or Bragg or someplace like that. They gave you basic training, right, in the unit you were assigned to. And I was assigned to a medical unit and to a, it was a litter bearer unit. Now, I don't know what ever happened to that kind of a unit. When I was in the Pacific Theater, we didn't have that kind of unit. I never saw one of them. But anyway, I'd been in this unit for I guess you want me to go into too much detail, but I'd been in this unit for probably two or three months. Seemed to me like I'd been in two or three years, but I'd been in two or three months, and I was an acting duty sergeant. I handled details and so forth and so on like that. And I had a company commander. The guy's name was Neider (sp?). He's a captain. And he kept calling me in and wanting me to go to OCS.

And I was a bachelor, and we were going to provide a cadre to go over to… they were opening Camp Claiborne, and we were going to provide a cadre, and I was going with this cadre, and I would have been a platoon sergeant. Now, I hadn't been in the Army for five or six months, but I'd be going over there. And so, that

was kind of the height of my ambition. I can't say I was too ambitious about the Army. I was wanting to get in and get out or get run over. So, he kept calling me up there, and he called me up one day and he said, “I want you to...” or they called me or somebody, a runner, I guess, came down to get me, and said, “The old man wants see you up in the CP.” So, I go up there, and he had filled out my application for OCS. And he said, “You've got a choice here of another branch,” he said, “you can take.” I think he said, “Here are the branches. You could take one choice of two branches.” And he said, “We got two schools here at at, at Camp Bowie.” He said, “We got an infantry school, and we got a quartermaster school.” And I knew what the infantry school was. I knew what the infantry was, but I did not know what the quartermaster was. And I said, “Well, that's okay with me.”

So, they put me down for those two. And a few, not too long after that, maybe a month or so, we were on the Louisiana maneuvers in 1942. And I'm, we had a break.. they had a break in between the maneuver action. And we were on a break, and it was on a Saturday, and they called... and I'm laying around in a shelter half, we were sleeping in shelter halves, and a runner comes down and says, “They want you up in headquarters company.” I go up there and the same Captain Neider was the company commander. And by the way, this was the day after we landed in North Africa, or we had heard some word about it, anyway. And I had heard that, about the landing, or the invasion of North Africa the night before on, on a radio. He had a battery radio. And I never saw a newspaper or anything like that. So, I go up there and the fellow, he said, or the captain said to me, he said, “I want you to be up at regimental headquarters.” Now, we had half of the regiment there, and the other half was out in Needles, California. He said, “I want you up, to be up at regimental headquarters at 12:00.” And he turned to me, and he said, “Do you have a clean uniform?” And that might have been reversed. I don't remember, which it was, but said, “do you have a clean uniform?”

And I said, “I have a pair of trousers, pants, but I don't have any shirt.” And Steinbrenner was the company clerk, and he turned to Steinbrenner and said, “You have a clean shirt?” And Steinbrenner said, very... he mumbled a little bit, because he didn't want to give his shirt away. But he finally said, “Yes, sir.” And

he said, “Go get it.” So, he goes and gets me this clean shirt, and I go over and eat early at chow and go up to the regimental headquarters just before noon. And I see a fellow that I know, a fellow named John Bolles. And John and I had been in school together and I said, “What are we going over to? Where are we going?” And John said, We're going before the OCS board.” I said, “OCS board?” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “This is a Quartermaster OCS.” So, we... don't know how we got over there, truck, probably. We get in this truck and drive over to Camp Polk, Louisiana. And they had a board there that had, as I remember it, it had an infantry colonel was the chairman of the board. And then, they had a quartermaster colonel, I'm pretty sure he was a quartermaster. And then they had an engineer colonel. Now, I figured all these out later on. I didn't know who they were at that time.

And this, I come in and of course, I'm a duty soldier, and so, I know how to salute, and I can look sharp in this, you know. So, I salute the colonel and do an about face and sit down and all that and answer the questions, “Yes, sir,” and “No, sir,” and that kind of thing. And this infantry colonel starts asking me questions, and he asked me about the war, what was going on and all that. And I told him what little I knew. And one of the other two said, “Well, he doesn't seem to know much about this.” And this infantry colonel said, “Well, give him, give the young man a break,” or “Give the boy a break,” or something like that. He says, “He's a field soldier,” said “he'd been out in the field.” Said, “He hadn't seen a newspaper or heard a radio.” Said, “Give him a break.” So, he asked me then, he said, “Have you ever read the quartermaster manual?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “You know what the number of the quartermaster manual is?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Do you know what the quartermaster does?” I said, “Well...” I'd been, I'd taken the detail up to draw equipage, you know, for the going on this trip. And I'd heard the quartermaster issue clothing, and I'd been on KP, and I heard that the furnished food. So, I said, “that the quartermaster furnishes equipage, clothing, food.” And then, I thought, if they do all of this, they'd probably furnish water.

So, I said, “And water.” And this engineer colonel, oh man, he popped up then, “They don't furnish water.” “Yes, sir.” And so, I go on a few questions like that. And this old colonel, the one in the middle, the infantry colonel says, asks me what I did. And I said, “I had the details and all of that.” And he said, “Do you

ever have to punish a man?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Do you like to do it?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "But you do it?" I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Well, that's all the questions I asked him". And so. I go back outside, maybe 15, 20 guys out there that had been through the board and they'd say, "How'd you do? How'd you do?" I said, "I didn't do very good. I didn't know, really know what Quartermaster did." And one guy said, "Oh," he said, "I answered every question." Another one said, "I did, too. I knew the books, I read the manual and all of that." And all of them knew they'd passed it, every one of them, except me. And you know, the truth about the matter is, I didn't really care one way or the other. It wasn't bothered me. And I didn't have a lot of ambition, really, I guess... what my son says anyway. But anyway, out of that whole bunch, they selected two guys, Bolles and myself.

We were the only two that were selected. They didn't select any of the others that knew all of the answers to the questions. You want me to keep talking? Well, I went to OCS, and OCS is a peculiar thing at Fort Lee. The old saying is the first month they. they scare you to death. The second month they worked you to death, and the third month they bore you to death. And that's absolutely true. I can remember that. So, they sent several of us... I'm not going to tell part of the story, but they sent several of us down to Meridian, Mississippi. And if you remember, the Army and the Air Force were together at that time, all part of one. And I go down there, and so, I report in. By this time, there's four of us, and we all report in to the adjutant. Every post had an adjutant back in those days, and I reported in to the adjutant or all of us did. And he said, "Well, I see you were assigned to such and such a truck company." And just another boy and said, "We don't even have those units." I said, "You mean we're supposed to be somewhere else?" They said, "Oh, no, no, no." He said, "Don't worry about it." He said, "That just means you're going to activate them, and means we're going to have some time to go over and get you a room." And said, "Come over here once a day," and said, "That'll take care of it."

So, we go over and get us a room in a tarpaper shack. And two or three days later, Sunday morning, a runner comes down and he says, "This colonel wanted to see us." He's the adjutant. We go up there to see him. And he said, "You've got 400 and something men coming in this afternoon." He says, "You have to…" and

said, “you have to get them a place to sleep and bunk and feed them and everything.” So, he said, “Who's the senior?” And we'd all gotten out of OCS the same time. I said, “Nobody's senior. We're all the same.” He says, “Who's the oldest?” And we didn't know, but I was the oldest. Another... one day older than one of the other guys. He says, “You're the company commander.” So, I go down there, and I make one of the mess hall officer. We ate on a combination mess at that time garrison and, and quartermaster. You got part of locally, and you got other parts of the quartermaster. And then, we had this other boy had worked in the supply room and he said, “well, I will take care of the supply. I know how to do that.” And the fourth boy said, said, “I can't do nothing.” He said he'd been a company clerk, is what he'd been. He said, “What about me just following you around?” I said, “Okay.”

I didn't have time to fool with him, then. So, you know, believe it or not, by that afternoon, we had a, we got a building, a building for all of them. We got all of them bunked, a place to sleep. We got stuff... we went out and borrowed a cook, and we went out and borrowed one NCO. We didn't have an NCO. We had absolutely nothing. So, that way we got 400 men. Well, they had a major that was, I guess was in charge of all of us. I don't know what he did, really. And so, he comes down there to me. And these men had just been in the Army about two weeks, and they need haircuts and everything. They looked terrible. And uniforms had never been pressed and all of that. And so, I found, I borrowed a shave, a barber kit off another company and found one of them that could cut hair, and put them all in line there. And he just cut their hair one after the other. They’d put you in jail for doing that now, wouldn't they? But anyway, he... about a week later, though, I’ll skip a lot of this… what would happen in between, I borrowed a sergeant off of one company, a staff sergeant. And I would divide the company into two groups. I had about 200 in each group. And I would take 200 of them, and I would go in and I would teach them, give them a class.

Now, you can imagine 200 people, that's not a very good class. And this sergeant would take the other 200 out on the drill field, and we'd split them up that way, trying to keep them, at least, busy. And the duty roster, at that time, everybody was on the duty roster. We had no duty roster. And this boy, that was a mess officer, would come over to me about 5:00 and he'd say, “Bill,” he said, “I need

ten guys for KP tomorrow." And I'd walk out the door and I'd say, "You, you, you, you," and I'd name all ten. I said, "Those are your KP, take them." Just pick them right out, out of the street there. And they went along here, maybe a week or something like that… and these boys are pretty smart. They caught on to that. So, I'd go out there at 5:00 in the afternoon, there wouldn't be a living soul on the street. So, that meant I had to go in the building and pick them out. And I could pick a man out, because a man was assigned to a bunk by name. In other words, John Jones sleeps in bunk, number one and so forth and so on. I knew that much about it. So, I go down through here and here's a bunk that's got no soldier.

This guy had been AWOL. Now, remember, this is an installation that's got barbed wire fence all around and got patrols all around it and everything. And he'd been gone for that week, and I hadn't missed him. So, funny thing about it was, he was there the next day. They got word out to him. I don't know how they did it, but they did. But anyway, this major said, "We ought to have an inspection on Saturday." I said, "Well, I don't know how it's going to work, but I'm going to do it." So, I took each company... I divided up four companies, 100 men in each company, and I took two of the officers, the mess officer and the supply officer, gave them a company apiece. And then I gave the sergeant another company that a hundred. And then, I had borrowed a, a corporal somewhere... I don't remember where he came from, and I gave him the fourth company. And I lined them all up out on the parade ground and this major comes out and I take him, my open rank march and so forth and so on. I remember I'd done a hell of a lot of drill. I knew how to drill. And so, we get through. Well, you know, he'd, he'd gone down through the line with me and everything like that. And the way this guy was acting, I'm beginning to suspect he doesn't really know what's going on.

And we finish. And I say, "Sir, that complete the parade," and salute him like that, you know, And, and he says, "What do we do now?" Whispering in my ear. And I said, "Well, we could go in the barracks." I'd made then lay their stuff out on their bunks. And he said, "Yeah," he said, "Let's do that." So, I thought to myself, "Damn, this guy, how, how did he get this, how did he get to be a major?" So, after the things all over with, when we get through there, and we couldn't have, we couldn't have passed an inspection for a corporal, but we passed that one with good shape. And I go to the guy that was working with him. I said, "How long has

he been in the Army?" He said, "He's the editor of a paper in Memphis and said he'd just been in the Army about a week." He hadn't been in the Army long. He'd gotten one of the direct commissions, you know. Well, anyway, at in about, I can't tell a time, really. You know, to me what seemed like it might have been a year, probably took a month if you can stand it, really. And I went over to a, finally, the officers that were in the cadre that was assigned to this company came in, after a week or ten days or a couple of weeks, maybe. And I was, belonged to one of the companies.

And I stayed in this company, I guess about a week. I didn't stay any longer than a week. And I remember, one day about noon, while I'm in this company, this company commander, and I don't remember his name, now, he called me and he said, "I want you to give a class to everybody on the Lee-Enfield rifle at 1:00." And I had never seen a Lee-Enfield rifle. I'd never seen one. It wasn't an issue item for the US Army. It's a British Army rifle, is what it is. So, I grabbed... I did find a field manual, and I grabbed that manual up right quick. I looked through there and I see how to take it apart and so forth. And of course, I knew something about weapons, but I didn't know anything about the Lee-Enfield. And so, I said, "Well, to clean the bolt and so forth. You take it. And you hold it back with a spring or something like that," and don't remember exactly how now, but and, "then you take it apart and all of that," you know. And so, I got through the class, and I thought, boy, I did real well. And I said, "Any questions?" And one boy holds his hand up like that. And he said, "Lieutenant," he said, "if you put a dime in between that slot, you would have just screwed that out without any problem." I looked at him, not funny, and I said, "How'd you know that?" They said, That's all we've had for the week before we came, we talk about the Lee-Enfield rifle." They knew ten times as much about as I did, and I'm teaching them.

Well, they made me the, I was the company commander, and they took another company and made me the company commander of that company, as a second lieutenant. And I went to camouflage school at Fort Belvoir. And while I was at camouflage school, one of the lieutenants that was assigned to me got promoted to first lieutenant, and I didn't get promoted. And I'm the company commander and he's working for me. He and the guy doing the assignments were big buddies. So, I come back and I'm still the company commander. I'm a second lieutenant, and

this guy is a first lieutenant, and he's in the company. And that goes on for a long time. We left there and various places, and finally we went up into Walterboro, South Carolina, one station along the line. And the commander called me in and said, “You know,” he said, “we can't get by with this.” So, they transferred me up to headquarters, and made me the motor officer for headquarters, and give this other boy, made him the company commander. And so, I said, I don't care about this. I want me a company or something. And so, they sent me back down to Augusta, Georgia.

I was transferred. and this is, must have been in, oh, in December, October, November... somewhere ‘43. I go down there, and I report in and the guy said, “The company you're supposed to take over is a platoon,” and said, “We've got a lieutenant that's running it now. And not only is he the platoon leader, he is the rail transportation officer.” And he said, “You're under orders to take it,” and said, “you're senior to him.” I said, “I don't want that.” I said, “Hell, I've been a company commander. I don't need no platoon leader.” So, he sent me over to... he said, “Well, you can...” I said, “Just send me overseas.” And I was a great guy to volunteer. I don't know why I did that, but I volunteered to go overseas. But I, he said, “You could sit around the headquarters, or you can go down and,” said, “I've got a casual company down here that, a casual battalion that needs officers.” And I go down to this casual battalion and a report in to the adjutant and adjutant said, “I had a riot in the mess hall yesterday,” and said, “I want you to be the mess officer to keep discipline in the in the mess hall.” It was a consolidated mess. Now, this was a, I'm going to have to guess kind of some numbers, but this was a consolidated mess for maybe 300 men and they're feeding over 2,000 in this mess hall, casuals, men that’s been assigned in there. So, he said, “You don't need to be there except at the noon meal.”

So, I go the next day, and I come in about 10:00, oh, earlier, about 9:00 in the morning. Thought this is great, you know, get to sleep late and everything. And, and I've got a, and I come in, they got a mess sergeant in there. And he said, “Lieutenant,” said, “I got you a desk.” And I got a desk and a chair, no papers, nothing on it, but a desk and a chair. And, and he said, “I'd like for you to... what would you like for breakfast?” And I said, “Well, I hadn't really much thought about it.” He said, “What about some eggs and pork chop or two, and some toast

and coffee?" I said, "Damn," I'm thinking myself, "the more I hear this, the better I like it." So, he, a few minutes here, they come in with a couple pork chops and eggs and toast and coffee, you know, and all of that. And so, he comes back and a few minutes later, he comes back, and he says, "We're starting to feed everybody." It's about 10:30 in the morning. I said, "This early?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "We have to feed them." He said, "We won't finish now, until after 2:00. There's so many of them." So, I walk into the line and I walk down the line, and I see something that looks funny looking on the line to eat.

And I say, "What in the hell is this?" He said, "That's potatoes." I said, "I never saw no, goddamn, I never saw no goddamn potatoes looked like that." He said, "Well," he said, "we got so many people," said, "we don't peel them." Said, "We mash them with a peelings on them." And then, he had something else. That was a worst meal I've ever seen in my life. And these guys come in and everybody's griping about the food and so forth and so on. I don't blame them; I would have been. too. We get through about 2:00, though, and I walk down to the adjutant office, and I said, "I've had enough of being a mess officer." I said, "I don't want no part of that." He said, "Well, what about being a company commander?" Said, "I've got a company," said, "In fact, I got two companies over here." I said, "I'll take them both." And he gives me these two companies that are over there. One of them. funny thing about it was. one of them was casuals, guys that just, you know, from this outfit and that outfit and all of that. But another one was a company that had been brought in, a black company, that had been brought in from Florida somewhere, deactivated, this company had, and they had brought him in as casuals to ship overseas.

And they had a first sergeant. They had all the NCOs, they had everything in them, which was a blessing. So, I took the first sergeant, and he and I walk around through the area, and I found an old tarpaper building along in there, nothing around it, abandoned and so forth. And I said, "What is this building?" He said, "This used to be a mess hall. It's got dirt floors in it and so forth." I said, "Have they got pots and pans in it and all of that?" He said, "I think so. It's locked." I said, "Well, break the lock." So, we broke the lock on the door here. When the NCO broke the lock on the door, we go inside and it had dirt floors, but it had old stoves and pots and pans and so forth and so on. And I said to him, I said, "Do

you think we could make a mess hall out of this, if I could get the rations?" He said, "I've got the best cooks in the Army back here." So, they had no doubt about it. So, I go on over to headquarters and I go in and see this adjutant again, and I said, "If you let me. if you tell the mess hall, to give me my part of the rations. I'll send over in the morning, and I'll feed my own people."

The guy said, "That's great." I said, "I can take 3 or 400 men out of that mess." He said, "That's great." So, we made our, put our own mess hall in there, and we had a good mess, dirt floor, all of that. We had a whole lot better than the other. And everybody's wanting to eat where we are. Well, now, this was probably, along about January of 1944, and I got orders to go overseas and February of '44. And I reported in to Camp Stoneman, which is Pittsburg, California. And there were some stopovers along the way, but it took 23 days. We traveled by ship out of San Francisco. And the funny thing, we went down to coast, just off the coast of South America, down south of where the Fiji islands are, and then we cut across the Pacific Ocean. Now, this is almost as far south as, as Australia. And but we did that, because of Japanese submarines in that area out in there. And we go over and we go up through the Great Barrier Reef, or so they said, I can't swear to it because I never saw it. And we come into New Guinea. And the first place in New Guinea, of course, Port Moresby. And we went from Moresby to Milne Bay and then Milne Bay over to Goodenough Island. And Goodenough Island, Goodenough and Fergusson Island are right off the coast of, not too far off the coast of, of New Guinea.

Now, I've always thought of New Guinea as going north and south, but New Guinea in reality is more east and west than it is north and south. And but I finally got off the ship at, oh, at Lae, New Guinea. And everybody had heard of Lae, because that's where Amelia Earhart was supposed to have flown out of and got lost. Well, I can tell you there ain't nothing in Lae, New Guinea, or wasn't then, anyway. And I can tell you something else about New Guinea. I've gone on New Guinea from one end of New Guinea to the other end, all the way, and I don't... everybody talks about jungle and what you see in the pictures and all that about jungle and what really is jungle are two entirely different things. And New Guinea, there's many trees and bushes and so forth and so on, but they're not thick like jungle. In fact, there's lots of areas in New Guinea that grasslands, big open

areas, no trees in it at all, kunai grass we called it. And I was stationed there, I left Lae and went up to Nadzab. That's, oh, I'd guess 15, 20 miles inland from Nadzab. I mean from Lae. And Nadzab at that time was the probably the biggest air base in the world. And Nadzab, they were flying over to New Britain and all, and the Finschhafen and so forth and so on.

They were flying fighter planes, other Major Bong, for example, and held the record for the number of planes he shot down and so forth, was stationed there. And but, a lot of things that people think about the Far East are probably entirely different from what they were over in Europe. There weren't any roads, that's the main thing. Very few roads in the Far East. And I'm talking the entire Far East now and I'm talking and with the exception of maybe right around in the Philippines, Luzon, probably, had some roads, but the rest of it, there wasn't any roads. And so, your principal supply was by air. It was by C-46s and C-47s. What would happen is, when they came in there, the first thing they would do would be to get enough land to put a strip in. And that strip, they just cut the grass off of it and, and put the steel landing mesh down on it. That's a strip for C-47 or C-46. They can land almost any place, and they don't have to have a long runway or anything like that. Almost all of your supply and resupply was done by these airplanes. Now, what we would do is, and I'll digress a little bit, what we would do is, we would come in on, say, a landing at, say, Morotai, and it would be several days before there'd be a strip built, a way to get in.

Well, we would probably have the only trucks, and I was in truck companies, at the time. We would have the only trucks that were, and we would supply the infantry division, because the infantry division had very few, at that time, the infantry division had very few trucks on it. And we would help supply that infantry, the infantry units along whatever island it was, or wherever it was and so forth. And then, when the got though, and they would be supplied by sea, they'd have to be at that time. But then, after they got on there, they'd build some roads, engineers then build some kind of road. And they would start flying it in and then we would haul it to wherever it went and so forth. And I went from, from the southern tip of, of New Guinea and the last part of February, 1944. And I left Japan about the 15th of December of 45. In other words, I have been all from one end of from one end of the, the Pacific Theater to the other end. And I was in

truck companies all the time. And I could, I guess, we probably had some things that we didn't know about, but there was no better assignment, there was no better assignment than being a white officer in a black truck company. That was...

Interviewer: What was… that's interesting, because what was your relationship to, and how were all those guys in the war? Because, you know, in Europe, we always heard about the Red Ball Express and...

Wall: We didn't have we didn't have anything like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know, I mean...

Wall: It didn't compare.

Interviewer: I mean, how was that, how did, how did they think about white officer and all the rest of them black and how did they perform and all that?

Wall: You know, and I'm talking, I can only say in my side, I went for almost two years, 22 months, I never had any problems. We never had any problems. Now, we had, I'm talking about as far as black and white is concerned, I remember on Mindoro, which is north of Leyte, we were assigned a bunch of laborers, and my company, the company that I was in, was a truck company from Texas and Arkansas, basically, that's where all the men were from. They assigned, and we had probably 125, 150 men maybe... they assigned us about I'm guessing at least 200 people came over and they were laborers. That's all they were. Now, these guys were, there were a lot of them were from Chicago in that area. And they were much better educated really, than the guys that were in the unit. But the men had been in the unit, knew how to do things. In other words, they had lived on these little farms, and they could take a... you'd have a breakdown, they could tell you a piece of baling wire and fix it. And that's no lie. They could do it. They'd guide you how to do things. They might not have had much formal education, but they sure as hell knew how to do things. And I had no problems, and we had no problems with them.

But these guys from, from Chicago, and the northern guys, and they were probably right. I don't think they were wrong. But of course, we didn't, we didn't agree with them, at that time. They did not, they resented the fact that these NCOs that were telling them what to do, were guys that, you know, had gone to the second grade and quit, or the sixth grade and quit. They kind of resented that, there was no doubt about that. And we had some problems on that. But it had nothing to do with black and white. Now, there were a few, I don't know whether I can tell it right or not, but I will tell it. When we were in New Guinea, they had a unit that had been. they had the black units that were guards in South Africa, not South Africa, but in Africa. They were, I forget what they call those companies. They were composite companies. All they did was walk guard around an air base and so forth. They broke those companies up early in the war, and they had this company was shipped over there, and they had, I'd say, a couple of hundred men in the company. And they had three officers. And one of the officers was an old Army NCO that had a reserve commission and had gotten commissioned at the beginning of the war.

He shouldn't have been commissioned. He just shouldn't have been commissioned, really. And they moved in right next to us at Nadzab, down in the lower end of the area, and we invited the fella and his two officers in the company to come over and have chow with us. And they came over and had chow and, and he's talking about, those goddamn niggers did this, and they did that and so forth and so on. Now he's a company commander. So, after he leaves, we'd say, “Well, you know what? He'd about to have some trouble.” But, you know, it wasn't any of our concern. So, two or three nights after that, I had been I don't remember where I knew this guy, but I knew an ordinance officer that had a company back over on the main post at Nadzab there. They were doing bomb work and so forth, Ordnance Disposal Company, I guess. And the Fifth Air Force headquarters was at Nadzab, and the Fifth Air Force had a, a club up on the hill, and they had they'd get this Australian rum and a few things like that, fat cats flying in from Australia. So, he had gotten a ticket. You had to have tickets. He had gotten tickets for two drinks, four drinks, two a piece. And so, he invited me to come over there. So, I drove over there in a jeep and, oh, I don't know what it was, maybe eight or 10 miles, quite a ways to go up there, really.

And he and I going up and to this club, and get the two drinks and so forth, and have a, you know, a good time. To us, two drinks, you know, that's great. So, then, that evening, so I come back, and it must have been about 10:00 at night, and I drive in the area. Not a soul in the area, my own area. I go out to the tent where we slept, three of us at the company, three officers, nobody in there. Everybody's gone. Nobody in the orderly room. Not a living soul in that area. And so, I can't figure out what's happening. But in a few minutes, they all come back. And what had happened was that these officers over this other company... now, we had been over there before, and we had noticed something. Now, New Guinea's hot, hot weather. The tent flaps were all the way down. We'd noticed that. And our tent, you know, rolled all the way up, and kept them rolled up all the time. And somebody had come up on the outside and fired a couple of rounds through the tent, and gone over this fellow's bunk bed, he had been laying in the bunk. And he'd come, and you could see where he'd come in here like this.

So, he called… it had all started out, yeah, it had all started out that day at noon. I'm telling you, it's a little disjointed because, you know, heel, it's a long time ago. An airplane had landed or something, and they had to have a work detail to unload this airplane. And this happened about 11:30 or something like that in the morning. Now, this happened to us all the time. We never paid any attention to it, because we always fixed lunch for the crews working, anyway, and took it to him. This guy, he tells the company or however many it was, many men it was, to go out and go to work unloading this airplane. And they say, “Well, we want to eat first.” He said, “Well, you all could eat when you get back.” And so, they had a big hullabaloo about that. Now, it wouldn't have happened to us, because we'd set him out at 11:30, and we'd have fed him, you know, regular time. But you know, he hadn't been around. He had a long time, enough to know that. And so that night, somebody fired one or two rounds above his head. And so, he, they had a real mutiny. One soldier and his daddy, this boy's daddy was a president of one of the biggest companies in the United States.

I’m not going to tell you the company's name, but in Chicago, very old Chicago company. He comes up to a guy that working on his tent, around his tent and puts a carbine up against his head and shoots him and kills him. That had nothing to do with this other thing. But anyway, they refused to go to work. They were not

going to work. They refused it. They rebelled against this guy. So, they what they did was, they relieved the company commander, and they had a boy from Texas, was the exec, Southerner. And so, they were talking about who are they going to put in there and all of that. And guy held his hand up and he said, I'll go. He said, "They won't, nobody going to bother me." And so, this boy from Texas said, "Okay." He goes back down there, and calls all the NCOs in, and they put the ones in, that was in you know, started all of this. And he never had a bit of trouble after that. I saw him after that. Several months after that, I saw him, ran into him. I'll tell you one story about him. He was giving me the needle. There was a big open field outside of where we were. They had kunai grass there at Nadzab. And so we got down… the war started moving north, and we didn't have a lot to do.

So, I got, I called in the first sergeant and I said, you know, I said, "I bet you we could go to the engineers and get a plow." I said, "If we could, could we put a plow in behind a deuce and a half and plow that field up?" He said, "We could try." He said, "We got lots of labor." So, we took a deuce and a half, and we plowed that field, plowed, borrowed a plow from the engineers, and pulled it with a deuce and a half. I don't know how we rigged it up, but they rigged it up some way. I told you, you guys could rig up anything. So, I then got seeds off the engineers. Engineers had seeds. I don't know why. Like tomatoes and zucchini and everything like that. And so, then I had them planted and. Oh, man, I've got. It looked like the cotton fields down south. I've got men all over those fields out there, planting seeds. Everybody's wanting to plant seeds, you know, to put them in there. We're going to have a garden. We're going to have the first garden and the biggest garden in the Far East. Damn, if we didn't get orders. This guy said, "You know what?" He said, "I eat tomatoes, and had good stuff to eat for months."

Interviewer: But now, as the war progressed and you moved north, or did you stay in New Guinea? As the war progressed, did you move north or did...

Wall: Oh, yeah. I moved north all the time. You know, I never had... the worst place that I ever was, was I, I think, the worst place in many respects was in New Guinea, was a place called Maffin Bay, New Guinea. Well, the across from Wadke Island, and they had, this is strictly hearsay, they had bypassed this area

and there was about a figure of 2,000 Japanese soldiers back in the hills behind Maffin Bay. And Maffin Bay had a little beach front along like this. It might have been, I'm guessing, two or three miles. And it had one division up here in a perimeter up in the north. And then you come down this there was a road in here, maybe 100 yards inland, and somebody had dug out or with a cat. And then down here was a smaller perimeter where the hospital was, and so forth and so on. And this little area between these roads here was several units were in here. I really think they brought a division in there to give it a little blooding, really, because they'd run patrols back up off of the Japanese and all that. But the other side of this road here was was forest, woods and all of that. And sometime in the past, and years before that, or the year before that, somebody had come in there and had mined that area and had booby trapped it, that whole area back in there and had not mapped it.

So, nobody knew where they were. And now all along this road through here were outposts, they would have an eight-man tent and then they would have a .30-caliber machine gun dug in on this post along through this road. And, and during the low tide, if we were going up toward the main perimeter, we'd go along the beach. But at high tide, you had to go along this road. So they brought in they had a division in there. When we were in there, they... and I don't remember how long we stayed there, right down in the sand where we were. They had a division that came in there... and I won't mention what the division was, but it was very poorly and had not been kindly led. And I don't think there's any doubt about it, the worst division the United States Army ever had. And you would be going along that road and they, the troops would hear a noise over in this other... a tree might fall and hit a one of these mines or something. They were going off all the time. The Japanese, all they were interested in was, trying to find enough to eat. We knew that. And they would start that machine gun. And if you would go up that road, boy, that's tough. They didn't pay any attention. They just start that machine gun, they were scared to death. They were absolutely petrified from something.

And I'll give you an idea, they had a lieutenant that took a rifle grenade and put a rifle grenade on the end of an M1 rifle, put it up to his shoulder and fired it. Of course, it broke the hell out of his shoulder, but he just wouldn't to see how it worked, and it worked. It got him shipped back home. But that division now,

some might be able to figure out what division it was, but this division went to Morotai, and I went to Morotai. And Morotai was really the first time I'd ever run into the Japanese where they were interested in, you know, holding anything. And at Morotai, they sent in one division, one regiment of the 32nd Division with them. That was the Wisconsin National Guard. And that was one hell of a good division, no doubt about that. Saw a whole lot of action during World War Two. One regiment, though, went with them with this other division. This other division put a perimeter, I mean, across the island. And the one in the middle didn't meet the two ends over here. And the first few days, the Japanese just pouring through the gaps. In fact, we were right in this point. They were coming right through here. Hell, we moved back because, you know, they were coming. They wouldn't pay attention to you. They'd come on in the other line and cut the guy's throat or whatever it was, but, you know.

(Begin Part 2)

Wall: I left Morotai, I think we went to Leyte in October. I left Morotai and went to Leyte, the same, I guess, in in the late October. And Morotai actually was, was an island that they had thought they would use for the invasion of the Philippines. But I think it was probably a little too far away. Now, I saw on Morotai... Morotai was a funny island. It had a very little topsoil on it and great, huge tree would just you could back a truck into it and knock it over, you know, it had no taproots to it. But we were on Morotai one day, and for the first week or so, I don't remember how long the Navy was flying cover off their ships during the day, and we didn't, we had no protection at night. And for example, the Americans owned the daytime, and the Japanese owned the night. And the Japanese would fly over, would start in at night, bombing, and you would see those searchlights. This is the first time I'd really ever seen this. It looked like that 90-millimeter would walk that searchlight up to that airplane and you'd see him bust that airplane right out of the sky. That's the damnedest thing you ever saw. And but, they dropped a lot bombs on us, and they sent a lot of patrols in. But anyway, we were there on Morotai, and one day a B-25, it might have been a B-24. One of them, our bombers comes in, it's in the afternoon, I don't know what time, and he comes in to land. Well, the only strip we had on the island was a strip that was used for artillery observation, and that wasn't near enough for that B-25. So, that B-25 he

tried to land, and he plowed up trees for 200 yards, and then another one tried to land. They were coming home. And then, another one came over and they put him on automatic pilot and they bailed out and so forth and so on. In fact, one guy we saw him bail out and he had a streamer could see him come, got a streamer. We said, "Boy, there's one that's dead." Well, not too long after that I read in *Life* magazine, I read it in *Life,* that's where I read it, this guy had hit a tree with a chute, and he hadn't been hurt. We thought he was killed. But what had happened was now this is, I guess, strictly a rumor, but this is pretty close to being true.

They had an Air Force general at Biak, which was down off the coast of of New Guinea. And the guys up north were getting all of the credit. And, you know, his people wasn't getting any credit. So, he thought about that he would try to bomb Balikpapan, which is over the Netherlands East Indies. So, he sent a brand-new airplane over there. Now, this is the story. It might not be exactly correct, but it's close. He sent a brand-new airplane from Biak flying over to Balikpapan. That's oil fields over there, the huge oil fields and the Japanese needed these oil fields. He flies this airplane over there and the airplane goes over there and comes back without any trouble. He didn't run into any opposition. He had plenty of gasoline and all of that. So, now the guy, he mounts a raid for Balikpapan, but he doesn't think that maybe the Japanese will be up in force and maybe he got older planes that are using more gasoline and so forth and so on. So, he sends out all these airplanes and they go toward Balikpapan, and never did get to Balikpapan. Japanese boys come down and force on him with fighter planes. And now they're coming back. And the closest place that they could land, or they think are the closest place the Americans are, is on Noemfoor. But we ain't got no strip. And these boys are caught between a rock and a hard place. There's no doubt about that. I don't know how many men they lost, but they lost a lot of men. And they lost one hell of a lot of airplanes.

Interviewer: Well, let me ask you this. Your experiences in World War Two, your experiences in World War Two and the fact that you were you were head of, of the trucking companies and all that, how did those experiences change you as a person?

Wall: How did they do what?

Interviewer: How did they change you as a person?

Wall: I don't know what they changed me any. You get older, you get smarter, maybe, or up to a certain point. But you know, up until World War II started, well, you know, I didn't give a damn whether the sun came up or not... didn't really matter. But after World War Two, then I'm interested. You know, I've got a family by now. I'm married, didn't have a family, but I'm married, and I want to finish going to school. And now, I've got to make a living. And whether World War II did that or not, I don't know. But I will tell you one thing that I firmly believe in World War Two, the GI Bill of Rights was the smartest thing that has ever been done. That all of these guys that had no education, they could have gone anywhere. Now, they could get an education, they could learn, and they built this country. I believe that.

Interviewer: Let me ask one more question. When these tapes are put together and they go going to be put out in the classrooms of Virginia, if some of those students were sitting right here and you could tell them what World War Two meant or why it was fought, what would you tell them?

Wall: Well, I really believe that, I don't you know, this is hard to say, but prior to World War Two, I don't believe we were a country. And World War Two united us as a country, and it made guys think more about what they could do or couldn't do and so forth. I think it it really one of the real reasons why we've had prosperity and so forth and so on. I don't think it might not have happened if it hadn't been for World War Two. But I still have to go back to that GI Bill of Rights. I think that GI Bill, instead of having a people... how many people, for example, had a college education? There wasn't anybody know. My daddy didn't have a college education. My mother didn't have a college education. Nobody in my family had one. My sister did. But she just lot younger than I am. But, but let's look at all these guys that invented things and made things and all of that. You know, they couldn't have done that if they hadn't had a little education. But I think World War II was a, I know it's a bad thing to say, you know, and I knew a lot of guys got killed in World War Two. I had an uncle that was killed in World War Two, and I was with him all the time overseas in the South Pacific, five days after that.

But I could go back and say that I think World War Two made this country a country.

Interviewer: Well, I thank you for your time today. That's perfect ending. Absolutely perfect ending.