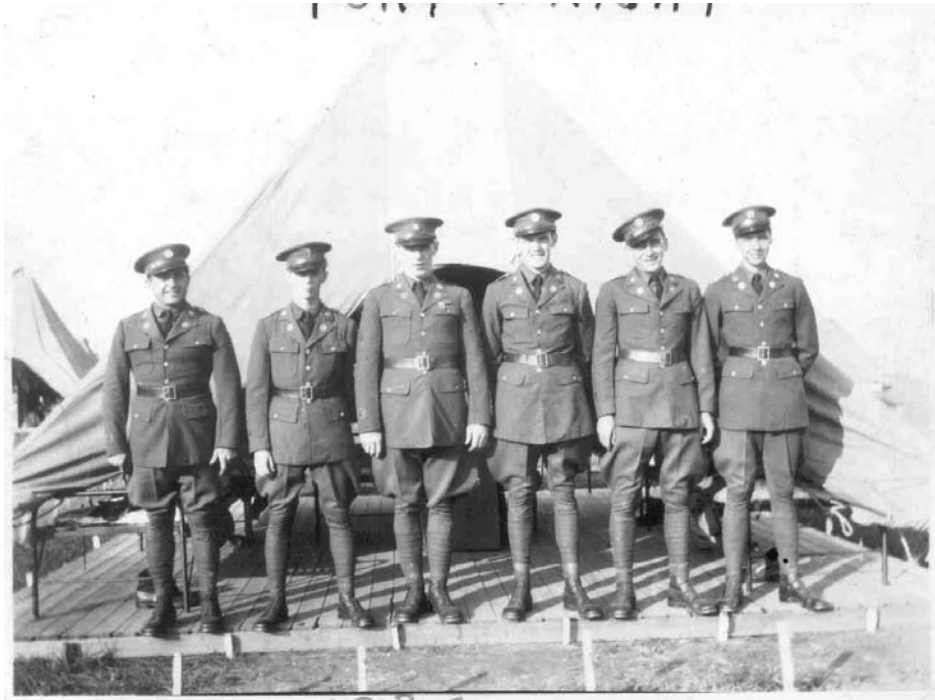


Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS,
 Oral History Recollections of Fred Schneider
 245th Coast Artillery, Battery F.
 1940-45

Self-Recorded circa 1985
 Transcript by Jo Ann Carlson, 2006
 Edited by Mary Rasa, 2011



Battery F, 245th Coast Artillery Unit Photo from 1936. Mr. Schneider's image is in bottom right.
 Individual photo was taken from this and enlarged.



Mr. Schneider, far left, at his tent.



One of the social events organized by the 245th Coast Artillery, Battery F and Headquarters Battery at the Brooklyn Elks Club, April 5, 1941.



Mr. Schneider, 2nd from left, as mess sergeant with his kitchen crew cleaning and peeling potatoes. All photographs were donated by Mr. Schneider to the NPS.

Photos courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

My name is Fred Schneider, I served with the F Battery of the 245th Coast Artillery from September 1940 until Oct. 1945 as a Staff Sgt. with F Battery of the 245th.

For the last ten years I've had the pleasure of returning each year to the veterans' reunion and was able to make some real fine acquaintances of some of the gentlemen I had known back in those years. The (inaudible) that we had developed over the last five years with a lot of wonderful, wonderful fellows. Now this reunion is sponsored by the National Park Service and the Sandy Hook Veterans Historical Society. Now the success of these yearly reunions are actually the results of the hard work of two park rangers Elaine Harmon and Tom Hoffman, as well as other rangers and volunteer workers that participate at Quarters 1 of the Society. (History House was the Society's Headquarters.)

Now Elaine and Tom have diligently searched for details of interest of all facets of life on Sandy Hook from its conception. Now in line with this, they have requested me to reminisce and attempt to put into words my recollection, from a humanistic standpoint, of what a normal G.I., ya know, how he had come along and developed prior to going into the service.

Actually my entrance into the military aspect was developed in 1935. I was from a middle class average income neighborhood. Several of my friends had joined the 245th Coast Artillery National Guard in Brooklyn. We found that this not only did this serve as an outlet for our energies, it provided us with a place to go on a weekly basis. We went there and we found that the training that we got in the Coast Artillery, as well as, the military training that we received was a real good thing for us. It gave us a little direction and more or less taught us how to fend for ourselves. We didn't have to depend on our parents to hang our clothes. We got that little discipline of taking care of your own

equipment, as well as, we had social functions that we would participate in. We would have our girlfriends down and we would have dances. It was a very good social form of life for us, as well as, athletic programs.

We had real good athletic programs. Some of us were interested in running and had the good fortune of winning some medals in some events. And we had some real good boxing programs there and this would all take place at the Armory once a week. I found that many of the officers that we had that were involved in training the people involved, were people that had responsible positions with the telephone company, with banks and with city employment and, oh I guess, just about every phase of middle class life.

These fellows were real diligent and really were interested in their work. What we would do at the Armory is we were put into certain groups. And some would be in the gun portion of it; some fellas would be in the plotting room section. In other words, we would determine where the gun was to fire and some of the other fellas would be involved in the actual physical work of firing these guns. And what we would do is go through programs every single week and we would act out and we would plan and we would learn to operate all of the instruments so that when we did go on a yearly basis for two weeks to an encampment somewhere, we could actually go up there and the things we practiced we could actually go up there and fire these huge disappearing guns and it's just amazing how these fellas just were well informed.

Our particular battery was involved with the huge 10 and 12-inch disappearing guns and each year our assignment would be Fort Wright, Fishers Island, which is right off New London, Connecticut. Probably, maybe, one-third from New London and two-thirds the distance over to Orient Point, on Long Island. This did have a Long Island status. In other words, actually, Fishers Island was under the jurisdiction of Suffolk County.

Now each year that we went there, we would use a different routing. One time we went up by railroad and we disembarked at New London, Connecticut. And at New London, Connecticut, we were placed on ferries of some sort and transferred over to Fishers Island. On the following year, I recall that we had taken trucks out from Brooklyn direct out to Orient Point, where, there too, we were put on boats and taken over to Fishers Island. And just some of the little funny asides, on the way over, we were passing some farms, apple farms and cider farms. Some of the fellas stopped to buy some cider and of course they were buying half gallons and they couldn't consume it all so they put it in their canteens and at that time we had all aluminum canteens. Well, by the time we were ready to drink it over at Fishers Island, we found that the stuff was absolutely green. And it was just lucky that we didn't wind up with tummy aches.

As you were being assigned to your quarters, we slept in, they called them pyramidal tents. Six fellas could fit in each tent. And, of course, as far as the bedding was concerned, we had these cots that were laid out there for us. We all carried a mattress cover. Well in reality it didn't cover a mattress. What we had to do was get in line and there was a big hay pile. And what we had to do was take some hay and place it into your mattress. Well, any of us that were a novice or for the first time, you felt that I was

going to take as much as I can and just stuff that mattress to capacity. That was a big mistake because you found that the pros, the fellas that were there before us, would just place a certain amount into the mattress cover and it would give them a fairly comfortable thing to lie on, but when you over stuffed it, well I'll tell ya, it was like having a spring come out of the seat in your automobile.

Of course, for most of the two weeks it was mostly pomp and ceremony and discipline and hard work with the guns and you'd reached the ultimate. You'd reached the point where you did fire a couple of rounds of the huge guns and that gave you an awful lot of self satisfaction for the entire year that you were spending going to the Armory each week and practicing it. You found that now here was reality and you were capable.

Well, some of the fellas, like I said, would be in place in the range section and very fortunately, I had been selected to be in the range section very early in my career in the National Guard. I was assistant plotter. In other words, that was the fella that would gain all the data and consolidate all the data through various people in the range section. And you would just supervise it to be sure that the data that was given to the gun so that when the gun commander issued the order to fire, that you would give him proper area to shoot in.

Of course it must be understood that the average fellas that were in the National Guard, were in from teenage probably into their 20's. And of course, the old adage of "all work and no play" we made sure that we did play. And some of the things that more or less became tradition was that, you would sort of harass the recruits. And for their first encounter, their first encampment, they were considered rookies until that encampment was completed. So we had some subterfuge that we would offer some these fellas, incentives to have their period of harassment shortened and more or less give them a status of being a regular, and not being a rookie, so some of the things we did were the following: We would tell some of these fellas that we were going to get a little game together and the fella that won the contest he now was accepted and no longer would be harassed at all. So, what we would do was we would get all these first year rookies, we'd get them out in the middle of the company street. And what we would do is we would have them take their shoes off and throw them into a huge pile. We would assure that the fella that had his own shoes on first would not, as I said before, be harassed at all for the rest of the encampment.

Well I tell ya, it was an awful thing. As we would see a fella getting to the point where he was pretty nearly having his second shoe on we would point out to the other fellas who were not as lucky and we would tell them that the only way you're going to be able to win at all, was to pull the shoes off of him. Well, it eventually wound up where somebody he did get his pair of shoes and we did honor the agreement but boy its an awful, awful thing but we did have an awful lot of fun and in retrospect, even the fellas that were involved, that is, the rookies, the following year they got their chance to do to others what was done unto them.

Other things that we did was this: as an incentive we told some of these fellas that maybe weren't quite happy maybe they were immature. They didn't quite fit up to the military life and in those two weeks and boy, they were just so homesick. What we would do was we would select a group of those fellas that were just unhappy, we would tell them we had an advanced detail that's leaving for home two days before and we would tell them that it would give them the opportunity of bringing some of the equipment back to the Armory, so that they would have things in order when we came back. And of course, there's no such thing as an advance unit going home, but there is an advance unit coming up maybe two to three days before the two weeks we were going to put in at camp. And those fellas would be selected and they would go up there and set up some of the tents and set up the beds and get some of the details, the kitchens and so forth. So, these poor fellas here, what we would do was we would offer to help get their knapsack packed up. What we would do was we would have some of the fellas get some rocks and put rocks into their knapsacks. And instead of their knapsacks being say 40-50 pounds now they were 90 pounds.

Now we would have the fellas get in full dress clothes and we would have them line up and at times, get some officers who would be reprimanded at a later date for participating, but what we would do is we'd have these fellas marched out to the parade grounds and we'd have them march in review and boy the happy faces. You could see the anticipation that they were going to get away from all of this roughness, and of course, very sadly at the end of the parade, we would tell them to report back to their barracks and you would see these poor guys lugging these heavy packs and I guess (laughter) some of them were ready to commit suicide. Nobody ever got that bad or anybody got to that point but its kind of a devilish thing to do to them but then there was next year and they could exactly the same .

One year we were assigned to Camp Smith which is up near Peekskill, New York and it was kind of a dull place. It was just a dry parade ground and a wooded area and we were working on some of the .155 mm guns at the time. Most of the time was involved in drill, drill, drill, parades and at attentions and being out and passing in review, and all of that nonsense which we thought at the time.

So, we, at that time I was a big deal sergeant. In those days if you were a non-commissioned officer, you really felt that you had accomplished something. You were really a big shot. What we did was, not getting a heck of a lot of money, most of us not having very much money, on a Sunday we would try to go up there and get as many brews and beer as we could. We would reach a point when we were kinda broke so somebody came up with the little gimmick that, "Gee why don't we get a beer container and put a little slit in the top and put a sign on it and ask for donations from a lot of the rookies and the guys that were a little gullible and tell them that this was for the Sergeant Schlitz Fund for Sergeant Schlitz who passed on." And of course, they were not aware that we were talking about Schlitz beer. These fellas here being very benevolent and very gracious they would throw in their dimes and quarters. Boy I'll tell ya, I guess half of us put -a - we were kinda crocked. We had a good supply of beer for the rest of that Sunday.

Ya know, back in 1939 and 1940 we could start seeing the seriousness of the world situation. What was happening in Poland and Germany and France and so forth. And of course, most of us just couldn't anticipate and couldn't foresee that there was going to be a Pearl Harbor. And that we too, would be involved. We couldn't even foresee the fact there was going to be conscription and they were going to bring people into the service.

Well, we should have had a little clue, because in 1940 we were assigned to Sandy Hook. And we went up there and we had our maneuvers. We were operating the guns up there in Sandy Hook. Well, it was, I guess, it was two to three weeks after we had been on an encampment and we were sent up, and we went to an area that they called the West Point camp. It was an area up where the St. Mary's Chapel is, opposite the movie theater. And there were pyramidal tents there where the West Point cadets used to go up there on a yearly basis and they used to have their maneuvers and I guess they used to have their gun practice and their artillery practice. And we were up there for a couple of weeks and it was only several weeks after that that Sept. 16th came about where the National Guard was federalized and we were told that we now had to report to the Army and that we were now in the Army of the United States.

In the four to five years that I served in the National Guard, there was one thing that we used to enjoy each year; we were involved in the Armistice Day Parade in Brooklyn, which was a very huge, huge parade. And at that time, our uniforms consisted of the four pointed hat, the campaign hats that you saw the World War I soldiers wear and we used to wear britches with wrap-around leggings. And one thing that I must say is that there was a proud feeling in our regiment that fellas would attempt to look their best and our officers were such that they maintained the dignity of looking like a soldier. And some of us, here again, talking about early in our career, you wanted to have your wrap leggings as neat as you possibly can. Well, I know that I, in one particular case, made my wrap leggings so neat and so straight that you could hardly see a seam on them. But that was one big mistake that I made. I must have gotten a couple of thousand yards on the parade route and I had to stop and drop out and loosen up my leggings, because it was just like having bandages too tight on your legs. And suddenly you find the circulation stopping and you were walking completely stiff-legged and that if you attempt to go on, you would fall flat on your face. So, it wasn't until probably 1939, that we started to get the long legged trousers and then we really felt like real dudes. We felt as if we were truly militaristic, ya know.

Several of the really pleasant memories that I really can recall being with the National Guard was in the athletic programs in Battery F 245^{thw} was particularly interested in the track and field portion and we had some real good entrants in fact, I still consider him my real good friends, Willie and Henry Tuting, who were very good runners. We had some fella Bucari, we had some fella Dunn. And we were very fortunate. We used to have the inter-regimental meets with the 106th, the 23rd and a couple of other outfits in the Brooklyn area. And we, I guess had one of the real outstanding track records.

I think that one of the real highlights was that we would have the meet over at Madison Square Garden where some of the greatest runners would participate. And I remember one particular fella, MacMillan. He was a miler. And we fellas were able to participate and enter into some of the events. Well, I guess the greatest thrill of my life, was being in a sweat suit and being down on the floor of Madison Square Garden with maybe 14-16,000 people watching. And of course, I never really won anything, I guess, but best I used to get was maybe a 3rd or a 4th in the 440 in Madison Square Garden. I ran around the track once and I guess, was half way back and everyone else was completely around the track from me, but just the fact that you participated and you were there. It was a real wonderful event.

Another little thought that I have is that we used to have these wonderful gala parties at the Armory where as I said, we would have a huge dance band. We would have guests. They were just lovely. Here again, money wasn't too easy to come by for most of us and I guess, just the fact that we had to get a new pair of shoes or we had to get the girl a corsage that put us in the position that we didn't have a heck of a lot to spend on drinks. Well, I guess the favorite with most of us kids was, we used to get slow gin. It was about .65 cents a quart bottle and boy, it was just like cherry soda. Now the only trouble was that the stuff used to creep up on you and for two to three days afterward, every time you took a drink of water, you'd have another drunk on again. And it was all fond memories and it was a diversion for us and it kept most of us out of mischief and if we had to do it all over again, I'm sure we all would.

As mentioned before, September 16, 1940, the 245th Coast Artillery was activated and put into the service. Now at that time, the wording was that it would be one year that we would be activated. Now in my particular case, I had been keeping company with my wife since 1939 and we had made tentative plans to get married in September of 1940. Well, when the news came that we were inducted into the service, and we were activated, we thought, well, it wasn't the end of the world the thing we should do was just to take it for what it is. It was an obligation. Let's put our marriage off until the following year. We pushed it off and the fact that I was going to be discharged one year from that date would cause no particular problem. And in addition, I was now onto my second enlistment, so even if I felt that the fellas were going to be in a little longer than the one year my enlistment was up in 1940. Well, I'm sorry, 1941. Because I went in '35 then '38 and three more years would have been '41.

Well of course, when it started to come around to September of 1941, there was a rumor about, which developed to be true was that all enlistments were extended an additional 18 months. Well, here again, it put us in a quandary. We didn't know what to do. Our plans were all up in the air and I went to the battalion commander and I said to him, "Well gee, we have made tentative plans for church and for a social time afterward and we were making plans for an apartment and what would be my status?" He pretty well assured me well the fact that my enlistment was up and it was a three year enlistment and that I would have gotten out. Well here again, no-one could assure you of anything. And I can recall that all over "tent city" where we were living at the time, when we would listen to a news report and try to get a confirmation of what this 18 months really meant,

I can remember the cry that the fellas would keep yelling and you could hear it over the entire camp, and it would be, "OHIO, OHIO, OHIO !" Well what did Ohio mean? It meant "Over the Hill in October." It was almost a threat from all of the G.I.'s who thought they were going to get out. That here, they now, were going to be in for an additional 18 months.

Well, it wasn't until two weeks I guess before that I was actually to be discharged before our wedding plans were made. And I went to the commander and I asked him and he told me well it looks as if I will not be getting out, that the 18 months was a flat extension of all enlistments. So of course, being kind of down in the dumps, I took off, got my uniform on and I went out on the highway and I hitchhiked home. And I went home to my parents and my girlfriend at the time who was gonna be my wife. They were kind of upset that and wanted to know how I got home on pass, and I said that I didn't. I was just gonna go AWOL, that they couldn't do this to me. Well, of course, after some discussion, cooler heads prevailed and they more or less got me to understand that it was the wrong thing to do. I decided to go back. I wasn't reprimanded. I spoke to my captain and he assured me that I should go ahead with my wedding plans and at this time he could not give any furlough but what he could do was to give me a three day pass in conjunction with a weekend pass.

Well, that was fine and I conveyed that to my fiancé and my parents and we went ahead with all of our arrangements for our wedding. Well lo and behold, the time came when we were getting married on a Sunday morning and Saturday night I received a telegram telling me to report back to the camp at once and that my pass was cancelled. Of course, here again, in frustration, I guess I could have bombed the entire city of New York and whatever else was around me. And here again, I said I'm not going back, and here again, we discussed it. I said, "Well, maybe we should call the camp and find out what it's all about." Well, of course, it turned out that my weekend pass was okay, but the three day pass was cancelled. I guess, that was September '41, and there was a lot of uncertainty, a lot of things going on. In fact, right prior to that, we had sent a whole cadre of men out who went to the British West Indies and to Antigua. So there was an awful lot that they knew was going on.

So what we did is, I called Atlantic Highlands, there is a hotel in Atlantic Highlands and made reservations and my wife was able to stay up there for the three days, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. And at that time there was a new gun placement being set up in the back of the Twin Lights and we were going to be the company that was going to be operating those guns. So, being a staff sergeant at the time, and I guess using a little influence I was able to get a jeep to take me up to the hotel. So I at least had some time with my wife for the three days. But however, here again, we were there from then until 1945 and my wife had already rented an apartment but on the few weekends that I was able to get home we were able to have the benefit of being together for some part of the time. But just to continue on that thought, we were very fortunate to have a little girl in October of '42.

Right prior to that I had made application to enter Officers' Candidate School. And I was accepted. And after the acceptance we were discussing it one night and a couple of the fellas in the discussion told me I was kind of foolish. That gee here, if I stayed in Sandy Hook I would have an opportunity of seeing my first child born and that it was kind of foolish to put in for OCS because I'd be slated to move out before. Well, after pondering it all night, I went and saw this Colonel Glime, and I explained the situation to him and I told him that it wasn't that I was trying to get out of the thing, but I had maybe acted in haste. He said to me that he would try very hard to get the order rescinded with the proviso that after the child was born that I would re-instate the application. Well, once my little daughter was born, well tasting the niceness of seeing her on a regular basis and seeing her growing up, I never did re-apply for OCS. Well of course, you never can second guess, but I think I was quite fortunate because I did spend my entire career in Sandy Hook, the entire five years.

For a period of two years I had quarters on the Post and was fortunate enough to have my wife and little girl up there and have them become part of my Army life for two full years. Here again, we had a wonderful set of quarters. We were in Quarters 29 which is two buildings away from the YMCA and directly in front of the Post Exchange. A block away from the Quartermasters', where my wife went shopping and maybe two blocks or so from the Post Theater, so I consider my self very fortunate that we did have a wonderful, wonderful, opportunity and I guess I was extremely fortunate.

Just going back a little, some of the things that I recall when we first went up there to Sandy Hook we were living as I said these pyramidal tents. We would have flaps up on top. We would have coal stoves in the center that heated the area for us. And after a time, and of course, those things were tied down with ropes on the side and with a pole in the center, well after awhile to improve our conditions, we were set up with floor bases. In other words, they made these huge 20 x 20 bases with a wood railing around it that the tents draped over, and now we had a nice secure platform to be on. And we had a wooden frame where the tent flap was in the front. That was the time I was in charge of a crew of fellows, a bunch of trainees that had come in January of I guess, of '41. I had these fellows placing the 20 x 20 bases in position with about 20 men, five on each side. I took a break one time and a bunch of these fellas were all from the New York area, from Hells Kitchen area, a bunch of rough guys that didn't care too much for discipline and the fact that they were drafted into the Army didn't help it.

When it was time to resume after a little break I found that we had five or six men missing. At that point the fellas that were still there, started giggling and felt that well this sergeant had now lost control. They were giggling and so forth, and I said to them, "Okay fellas, let's get going we'll now start picking up the base and putting it in place." They said, "Gee there are only 15-14 of us. How can we handle it?" I said, "You thought it was funny when these fellas took off. Now I don't think you think that it's too funny." Boy now they got angry and they said, "Hey look if we can get these fellas back will it be okay?" I said, "Sure." Well I guess in about three or four minutes they corralled these fellas that were gonna goof off. They were angry with them and not me

anymore that these fellas were trying to push the load on them, so luckily we got the job done. No hard feelings. Everything went well.

I remember in 1941, when we were going to get the first contingent of trainees or draftees coming in, we fellas were all assembled on a field on Pershing Field. I don't recall who the officer was. It could have been General Gage. I'm not quite sure but they made a speech to us and they told us we were going to be getting several thousand of these fellas who were now trainees and he said, "I want that word used very, very properly he says because we do not want to use the title draftees. We want you to treat these fellas with respect. They are fellas that are civilians suddenly thrust into this environment and we don't want to hear of anybody badgering these fellas."

Well I tell ya, it was a very sorry, day. We saw a bunch of these fellas disembarking from a boat. They came in from Grand Central station over in New York. They came in, and of course, our government, our country wasn't prepared for a huge enlargement of the armed forces. And what did they do? They gave them coats. The old World War coats with the rolled collars. They gave them the old breaches with the rolled leggings. And many of the fellas when they packed their duffle bags they in a hurry they wound up with two left shoes or two right shoes. Boy, it was a sorry sight. These poor guys coming in totally confused had no idea where they were going or coming or what was ahead of them. And here they are some of them trailing with their, their leggings trailing behind them. The guy behind him stepping on it, one fella going down with his left foot while the other guy is going down with his right foot, one guy's head was up and the other one is down. And I tell ya, it was an awful sorry sight.

Well, in that first contingent too, we had a lot of fellas from the Kentuckys and the Georgias and that portion of the country. And I recall that when these fellas were placed over in quarantine, one fella very, very sadly he had asked me if I would kindly get this card in the mail to his mother that she don't worry about him. And as I was going to deposit the card I read on it said, "Dear Mom, I don't know where I am but I do know that I crossed the Atlantic Ocean." I can just see this poor mother thinking that this fella was overseas. That was just some of the situations that developed with those poor guys, totally confused.

As time went on, prior to war being declared, many of the troops, we had cadres leaving our individual outfits. Some of the fellows wound up in the Aleutians. Some wound up in southern states and suddenly were given winter equipment. And some fellas, vice/versa, were shipped out and en-route were given winter gear and then suddenly were given summer gear and were transferred to the West Indies and I guess some of the Islands over the Pacific.

And we lost about 85% of our tactical outfit. In other words, we replaced those fellas and we had to retrain 85% of the men that we had previously had in our outfit. And that was the reason that some of us were quite fortunate we were kept as key individuals and we were kept there so that we might train some of these other fellows and at least have an outfit that had a semblance of being a tactical outfit and could fire those guns if need be.

And one of the situations I recall very well is that right prior to the War we suddenly were alerted one night and we didn't know what was going on. Everybody was on alert status and then finally they selected a certain number of men from each company and they sent a cadre out to Bendix, New Jersey. Well, I guess there was about 1,500 of us sent down there and of course, and as the story started to develop, and as I recall, probably that was in October or November of 1941.

The story that had gotten out was that there was a huge strike going on outside a nut and bolt factory, the Bendix nut and bolt factory at the Teterboro Airport. And the information that I recollect was that they made universal size nuts and bolts that were being used in some of the armored tanks that we were using, and also for some of the aircraft that we were using at the time. And that it was a real crucial operation that could hurt our military effort. So, what was it, here again, as I recall, there was over 1,000 Nazi inspired people that were down there picketing these places. And I guess it was all part of a plot, a plan, ya know. And we now had to go into that nut and bolt factory. And we could not permit any more than three people ever congregating at one point and talking together, even in the rest room. We had fellas sitting up on a platform overlooking the factory with browning automatic rifles. We had .30 caliber machine guns set up on the roof. We set up guard posts that anyone that wanted to enter that area, the Teterboro Airport area, and going particularly into the factory, had to have a clearance. So even though there was no war at the time, there was an ominous feeling. There was just a feeling that something terrible was happening.

And I was at that location when we were suddenly called on a Sunday morning, Dec. 7th. We were called into the commander's office. We non-coms were told that this is war and they read the articles of war to us. And of course, the highlight was that anyone leaving their post would be, the penalty was punishable by death, and it was quite scary. Well, I don't think that we had our (inaudible) and were told and read the articles of war.

One just another side, and some of the stupid things we do and don't really understand the significance of. This other sergeant and I, we had plans. He had his car at Teterboro Airport and he said to me, "Well let's go." and I said, "Where are we going?" and he said, "Home." I said, "Oh my god, we can't go home. You heard what he said." And he said, "Aw come on. Let's go." Stupidly, I was a follower and I went along with him. And now we got to the Holland Tunnel or the Lincoln Tunnel at the time and all of the crossing guards there, the tunnel personnel, stopped us, we fellas were in uniform, and told us we had to return to our post. And him being a pretty smart guy saying we were with the 245th Coast Artillery over in Fort Tilden, which meant that we would have to head into the city. So we were cleared and we went through. And of course, I can't really tell you what it was really like when we went home and here only newly married two months. And I came home and told my wife and, of course, they had heard everything on the radio, the bombing of Pearl Harbor and so forth. They urged me to make sure I get back, and, "Oh what a terrible thing." Well, fortunately we did get back the next day.

We went back to Teterboro and we supposedly sneaked in and weren't aware that anyone saw us, but we were called into the commander's tent. He was a real liberal guy and he just told us he was very sorry that he couldn't trust us any longer and that we would have to leave and would have to report back to our own outfit in Sandy Hook. Boy, I'll tell ya, it was quite a blow, but here again, we could be very thankful. We could have really gotten into some serious trouble or even court martialed. It could have changed our whole lives, right at that moment. Well, a very funny thing is the fact that we were away and here again, time gets away from you. We were gone four weeks or six weeks. I'm not quite it could have been longer. But when we got back, we drove back in his car and we took our gear with us and we wound up in Sandy Hook. And now we went to our barracks, and of course, at this point we had foot lockers, and we had wall lockers because we were a permanent outfit. That was our assignment on the post. Well, we went to the barracks and I went in and as we approached the barracks general area, it just seemed strange. It seemed that the windows were a little bit cluttered up. It just seemed strange and at some point we noticed that and we realized afterwards that all the wall lockers were gone and all the foot lockers were not placed the same way. And as I went up to my room, there were two other sergeants up in my room which was up on the second floor. And I asked them what they were doing here. Is this barracks so-and-so and they said, "Well, yeah." They had just moved in and that F, our battery, had pulled out and they didn't know where they went. I said, "Wow. What the heck is going on?" So of course, we now went back over to the Guardhouse and found out we found that we asked and inquired over there and were told that they were just transferred to a different building. And of course, here again, there was the darnedest feeling because here you were, you were in limbo you just didn't know how to think about it. It turned out that it was all okay and we got back to our outfit okay and we resumed our duties as we did before.

A very interesting thing was that when I was in the National Guard I was very fortunate to be appointed as a sergeant. So in my time in Sandy Hook, in the early years, I had remained a sergeant, because in the Coast Artillery battery there was no rank higher than sergeant excepting for the 1st sergeant, who was technically a master sergeant. And at some point later on, the only other appointment higher than a sergeant was for the supply sergeant, who now was to become a staff sergeant.

Well, there was one point we had reached that our 1st sergeant had left and he was to be replaced. And they had a very scientific way of replacing some of the ranks like as a 1st sergeant was. Now the captain we had at the time, called me in, as well as another gentleman, named DeFilippo. And he told us that he was having such a tough time to determine who should be 1st sergeant, which gave an awful lot of authority and in addition gave an awful lot of additional pay. He interviewed me several times and he interviewed this DeFilippo several times and he finally reached a point that he said, "Look." He said, "I want you to come in here and I want you to tell me why he should not be 1st sergeant." And he did the same with Joe DeFilippo. He would like him to respond why I should not be 1st sergeant. After we had our little dissertations, we were informed that he was still at a blank dead end and that he didn't dislike one over the other and he just didn't seem to know at that point what to do. So what we did was, we agreed

that a coin would be tossed and the fella that called the proper coin toss, would be 1st sergeant, and with the assurance that if there was a rank higher than sergeant that came up, we would receive it. We would be the first eligible for it. Well, I called, and I called wrong. As a result, Joe became 1st sergeant.

Well I guess, several months later, a directive came out and said that the mess sergeant should now be staff. And the captain approached me and told me that as he had promised me that if I wish I could have the job as a mess sergeant. Well, the only cooking I had ever done was at home when I would help myself to some lunches and observing my mother who was a very meticulous housekeeper. I told the captain I wasn't quite sure whether I had the capabilities and he assured me that knowing of my character and having a feeling that I would maintain the levels of cleanliness and the levels of operation that he thought I was capable of, that I would do a good job. So, here again, I discussed it with my family and they said, "Why not?" So, I told them that I would take the job over. And without being real egotistical about it, I guess that I was very fortunate, and I did have a successful term as mess sergeant. Not without a lot of pitfalls. There were times that the cooks would challenge me as to how I was to prepare a specific meal the techniques and the timing and so forth. Well, fortunately, you had a cook and bakers manual that had thousands of recipes. And when the menus were prepared, they were prepared on the basis of weights and ingredients, and times and it was spelled out in this cook's manual. So when I was challenged at times, I would just tell them to just turn to page such-and-such and that's the way I wanted it done. Well after a time, they knew you couldn't be buffaloed and I did keep real good sanitary ruling of the place. I made sure the mess hall was clean and kept properly and in a sanitary way. Here again, very fortunately I did receive several commendations from the Sanitation Division of the health grouping, whichever, I don't exactly recall, but I did receive a couple of commendations for having a fine clean mess and keeping fine standards of cleanliness.

And even one thing that I took upon myself in the typical mess hall barrack you had a huge wall between the kitchen and the mess hall and you had a heck of a time trying to control roaches. Ya know, it would come in barrels, it would come in bags, it would come in boxes. Ya know, even though you kept things clean, they were would get into the cracks and crevices. So what I did is I told one of the fellas in our place, in our company, if he would give me a hand and we would tear the wall down. Well, we tore the entire wall down between the kitchen and the dining room. And we replaced that area just with two regular tables that we used as counters. They were able to be cleaned very easily with no cracks or crevices. Well, the reaction from the Engineering Corps was, we were subject to court martial, because we had no right to alter buildings as we did. But after a couple of inspections, it was found that it was another way of keeping high standards of cleanliness and sanitation. So, it was a short time after that that a directive came out that the walls were torn down between the kitchen and the dining room. And that was just a moral victory and I guess that it was just another bit of satisfaction that I got out of my job.

While I was performing my job as a mess sergeant, I also was performing my job as a plotter on the 12-inch barbette rifles down at Kingman and Mills. And I recall one

incident. We were waiting to fire the guns. And of course, those guns would fire roughly 12-14 miles. We were awaiting a real clear day that the visibility was real good and several of us, that had key positions, we were restricted to the Post so that we would be readily available in the event we got the go to fire the guns.

Well, we had some pretty poor weather and the forecast was that it was going to continue for another day or so. And what I had done was, I got an illegitimate pass and I snuck out to the city to see my wife and parents. The next day I came back on the boat the *Chauncey De Pew*, that was the boat that came from the Battery, from New York to Sandy Hook. And to my dismay, as we were starting to approach the Hook, I saw the big red flag up, indicating that there was going to be some artillery firing. Then suddenly there was a couple of big blasts. And lo and behold it was my battery that fired. Well, they had looked for me and couldn't find me and they had to have the assistant plottor perform my duties. They were successful. Everything went off without a hitch. And of course, when I came to the captain, he called me in I was reprimanded very harshly and he told me he could have taken more stern measures but he restricted me to the Post for about five to six weeks. And here again, I guess I got off pretty lucky.

I have mentioned, previously, that I was very fortunate to have quarters on the Post and my wife and child were up there for two years or so. Well, there was an incident that developed up there where I had made arrangements to get the quarters. They were in pretty sad shape. They needed to be painted very badly and I guess I was very fortunate that I had a great deal of friends in the outfit. I recruited some of them and they came over and gave me a hand and we painted the entire four rooms of the place and we enameled the woodwork and boy we had the place shining and spotless. And when the day arrived for my furniture and my wife to come, the moving van came into Queens which is a suburb of New York City and picked up all our furniture at the apartment at which my wife had been living and they preceded my wife by about five to six hours. And they headed for South Jersey, to Sandy Hook and my wife took the *Chauncey De Pew*. That was the boat that I mentioned before that took the soldiers and their guests to Sandy Hook from the city. And my wife arrived late in the afternoon.

Well in the interim, when the van pulled up I had the aid of some of these friends of mine. What we did was we unloaded that van in post-haste. We had that thing empty in no time. And what we did was we laid the rugs on the floor, we took the dishes out of the crates. We put it in the closets. We set the furniture up. We set the bedding in the rooms. I think we even had the curtains up. I tell ya, my wife said it was something that she would never forget. That here several hours she had left her home almost intact in NYC and here it was several hours later and to walk into a place and see all of those furnishing, you had seen several hours before and had them into a completely new place and she was able to come right in and the surroundings that were familiar to her because everything we had was all in its place. It was just a thing she said she would never forget.

In reference to the Guardhouse, which is now the History Museum, of the National Park Service, there is some memories there that come back to me. One is that each company

would send a group of men that would partake in guard duty. That would be for a 24 hour period. And during that 24 hour period, each man would pull guard duty on a particular post for two hours and he would have four hours off. And during that 24 hour period, you had to keep your entire clothing on, including your cartridge belts and everything else, and so forth and have your rifle stand nearby and so forth and you had to be ready in the event that any kind of alarm was to sound. One of the guards would report some kind of problem that the entire guard unit would have to respond.

And it comes to mind that we had a fellow that was in prison there that I don't even remember he was a soldier up there. He was a habitual prisoner and I don't know exactly how deep his offenses were but he had the name of Yardbird. He was such a belligerent and nasty guy that he would curse at the guards and curse at the provost marshal and they would have to put him into solitary even to the point that he would take his liquid waste and throw it out the bars at one of the guards and more or less challenge him to do something about it. He was just a real bad guy. Like I said, they used to call him Yardbird. I have no idea how he got out, or when he got out or what the disposition of his case was but many years later I work in management for a propane company that had a bunch of teamster drivers. There was one point in time where we had a pretty nasty strike where not only were the employees out there picketing and challenging people, and threatening people but they also had some union busters out there. And one day as I was coming back into the plant, as I was approaching the gate, there was some rough looking character there and suddenly his voice hollered out, "Hi sarge. How are you?" I looked, and of course, I couldn't identify anyone I knew. Then he hollered again and he came over to the car and I said I don't remember you. And he said, "Don't you remember me? I'm Yard bird." And it's just funny how an alliance can develop. Here we are both times we were on opposite sides of the table and yet there was something that brought us together here. There was something of a common bond. Now here's this guy acknowledging me as if I were an old buddy of his and he told me, listen, you can come in and out freely, don't worry about it 'cause I'll see that nothing happens to you. So you never know where it comes from.

I guess something that I had would have been absolutely strange in the Army but today that during that period when I was mess sergeant and I don't know how I even manipulated the deal or even how it came about but I was able to requisition a G.I. bike. And for almost a two year period, I had a G.I. bike with the Army identification on it and it was assigned to me. I was able to use this to travel from my quarters which was maybe a half mile to the barracks. And when I think of it now, it just seemed like it was the real horse and buggy days but I tell ya, that certainly gave you a chip on my shoulder and I felt like I was a guy that had a limousine. That shows you how your values change.

During the period that my wife and child were up there on the Post, just for a change of pace, she went back to the city and visited with and my parents and her mother and spend a week or so. I had left there, and this one evening I told her I'd see her in a week or so. When I went back to camp, the minute I got back there I sat down I wrote a little letter to her and tried to explain to her what had happened on the boat. We met with a bunch of fellas and I got involved in some chin music which is just an expression of a lot of

gabbing and a lot of idle chatter. And when my wife got the letter and my parents asked her how I made out she said, "Boy, they must have had a good time. They must have had a band and everything on the boat." My father said, "What do you mean? A band, what would they have a band for?" She said, "Look. I don't know what the word chin means, but he said they had music." So that was something that over the years we've been able to talk about and really get a kick out of. Good ole' chin music.

I'm extremely thankful that I happened to be a very fortunate individual during the Second World War spending all of my time at Sandy Hook. In fact, there were over 2,500 fellows that were activated from the 245th Coast Artillery in Brooklyn. And when the time came that we were discharged, there were merely six of us from the original group that were discharged from Sandy Hook. In fact, the fact that I had quarters directly across from Post Headquarters when I got my notice that I was to be discharged on points, all that was necessary for me was that I had gone up to the medical and I had my medical taken or my physical taken, and when it was the actual time for discharge all that was necessary for me to do was walk across the auxiliary parade ground to the Post Headquarters which is now the headquarters unit for the National Park Service.

And I was given my discharge I came back home and just as a lark I put on my civilian clothes. That evening, my wife and my daughter and I went to the Post Theater. And we walked in just a couple of minutes late, the show had started. And as I walked in, of course, all these G.I.'s were in there and the fact that I was on the Post for all of those years a good many of these gentlemen in there, knew me. And as they started to notice me I was standing there with my civilian clothes on they all started to cheer and applaud and I started to bow as a real ham. And they turned the house lights on, and I tell ya, it just was a lot of fun and it was a lot of excitement.

It will be noted that on this particular tape that I provided it was more or less the light side of that five year period. And it was always my philosophy to try to do the best job that you possibly could. And in addition, to make the best of any circumstance that you might be thrown into. And I'm just extremely happy that I can have these recollections of all the good times and I don't have any sadness and I don't have any hate or dislike and it's a real, real, interesting thing to get back there, as I said, each year.

I am presently retired, and I have been for the last three years. I live out on Long Island which is probably only 60 miles from Sandy Hook so I do make it my business to get back there and have some real, nice recollections. I hope that this will provide some of the lighter side of my period in the service. I guess there is enough very, very, sad and dramatic experiences that are told by other people that are involved. As I said, I am very proud and I loved the period that I put in at Fort Hancock and it's really a pleasure to get back on a regular basis. Thank you very much for permitting us to provide this tape.

Elaine Harmon narrates "That concludes side 2 of Fred Schneider's recollections of serving with the 245th Coast Artillery, Battery F from Sept 1940 thru Oct. 1945."

END OF INTERVIEW