

Arthur Koblisch

Interviewed by Brian McDevitt

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McDevitt: I'm Brian McDevitt and I'm with the Pritzker Military Museum. Today I'm joined by Arthur Koblisch. He volunteered in 1942 with the US Navy and was part of the V-12 program that took place. Arthur, to start off the interview, when and where were you born?

Koblisch: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, on February 29th, 1924. Leap Year Day.

McDevitt: And what was it like in Detroit at that time?

Koblisch: I only lived there 'til I was six years old. I remember doing a few things there with my dad. I don't know if you're interested in that type of information or not. It was nice living. We lived in a house that backed up to what they called Motorboat Lane. You can go out to where the garage would normally be, and there was a lift and people would have their boats lifted out of this Motorboat Lane and stored in the garage so instead of an alley we had a waterway there. And I remember, I shouldn't say I remember, I was told that when I was a kid my dad took me for a ride in the rowboat, and we went down to the end and there was an abutment out there of a bridge and my dad tied up the boat and got out the front of boat and he looked around and I was, maybe, two years old. I turned around and walked out the back of the boat and he ran to the back and he looked and I was, he knew I was going to come up, and he reached in up to his shoulders and he grabbed me by a leg and held me up and I let out a scream [laughs] he knew I was all right. He had left home with my mother sitting on the back stoop and when he brought me back and I was soaking wet, oh my dad was all nervous. Mother said, "Max, what happened to Arthur?" "Oh he just fell in the water." "Max you're not telling me the truth." She said, "I can see his little red rompers going around in the water." And that's exactly what dad explain. He's "Naw, naw, naw, he just fell in." It was years before he had the guts enough to tell her, that's what he said what happened. She said, "Max you don't have to tell me, I knew it all the time." So that's a small vignette.

McDevitt: So you lived there until you were six. Where did you move after Detroit?

Koblisch: We moved. Our first home was 6541, 26 Place in Berwyn. That was in 1932.

McDevitt: And do you remember anything about, what do you remember about living during the Depression era? What do you remember because... can you just tell me what it was like growing up at that time?

Koblisch: Well, I think we were just a normal family.

McDevitt: What did your dad do?

Koblisch: My dad was an engineer and shortly after we moved to Berwyn we moved to Roseland and my dad worked for Pullman. And I would, occasionally, go down there with and walked with my dad to the plants and go out to the back where the boats would dock in Lake Calumet. We would go swimming out there in Lake Calumet. And I went to Fenger High School. Occasionally, just went to look around. I was a kid then; I wasn't even old enough. I was amazed at this big building, and we had nice neighbors. Everything was fine. But Dad only worked there for about a year and then he was laid off. There was no work. And he got a job at Campbell Soup up farther north. My mother's sister worked at a real estate office on North Avenue just across the street from Oak Park. At this real estate office, they had an apartment, big apartment with fifty-two units in Oak Park. Dad had no job. We had a place to live. My dad was handy, and at that time he arranged to repair the multiple refrigeration units in this big apartment building.¹ And for the exchange we had a place to live. And so my dad got that all in ship-shape and so he didn't have to do much anymore, and he started getting contracts to do this with other buildings, in the area. And soon he had a lot of these worked up. He had an income coming in. And then he started working on individual household units at that time they weren't sealed units like they are now. They were a motor driving a compressor and he fixed these and he had so much work he didn't know what to do. And I wouldn't see my dad from weekend to weekend and that was the beginning of the success of our family because in...about three years, maybe four, Dad was on his own and Pearl Harbor came, and I remember I was laying on the living room floor reading the Sunday papers—the funny papers—and listening to that. My folks were still sleeping and I went up and woke them up. Told them about...boy. That was Sunday, December 7, '41. The next morning dad got on the telephone and he bought...he contacted a real estate outfit and he said, "I want to buy an apartment building and I want to buy it, today." The guy says, "We don't have anything to sell." He says, "Well you'll find one." And later that week, he came back, and Dad bought a building on Humphrey Avenue in Oak Park, which had twenty, twenty-one units, something like that², and he got that in shape and now he had even more income. By 1945 my dad had accumulated enough wealth that he retired. It was '45 so my dad was forty-six years old. He was born in '99. He continued to enjoy

¹ Jeff Koblisch, son of Arthur Koblisch, revised the transcript, after his father's passing, and provided comments: "In the 1930s, some large apartment buildings had a central refrigeration unit that cooled the ice boxes in the separate apartments. My dad's aunt, who worked for the real estate management company, asked my grandfather, Arthur's dad, if he could repair one. My grandfather told me, "I was an engineer, I could do anything." Few people could do this kind of work, so the demand for his services was very high."

² Jeff's comment: "I think had nineteen or twenty-one units".

life with our whole family and that was the beginning of real success for our family. So that's a short vignette of what our family did in the Depression.

McDevitt: And did you have brothers and sisters?

Koblish: I had one sister. She was five years younger than I did but she died many years ago.

McDevitt: So your dad's starting to be successful, you're going to high school and, then Pearl Harbor happens. Can you kind of describe to me what the atmosphere was at the time when Pearl Harbor happened? What were you and your friends talking about? Did it change any of the direction when you were in high school?

Koblish: No, no, it did not. And I don't really have any...you know I was just a run of the mill high school kid...I had a lot of friends in high school. I started dating gals. To go back a little bit before Pearl Harbor, if I may, in 1937 our family went swimming on Lake Michigan at the 12th Avenue Beach. I had developed into a reasonable kid. I was a swimmer. I was thirteen years old. I had swum in a little park district wading pool, literally, is what it was. I could swim pretty good for a little kid and a life guard down there saw me swimming and he took me down to the Medina Cub, which is now the Continental Hotel and I swam there and got my only coaching in swimming, at that pool. I swam with some really great swimmers. Adolph Kiefer was there. He won the Olympics in backstroke. Al Green was a diver he placed in the diving. There were other good guys...swimmers: Otto Jarets, George Lowe. And as a thirteen-year-old kid, I couldn't keep up with these guys, but I was pretty good. And I can remember these guys didn't want to fool around with a lot of swimming. When they needed somebody to swim, I swam on two, three national winning relay championships. There were three great swimmers and me. And so anyway...and then I finished high school then. And I was on the swimming team in Oak Park...and I loved to swim. I liked the workout. I went to Northwestern University. I graduated from Oak Park in the middle of 1942. On July, I believe it was July 1st, I started a year at Northwestern as a young engineer. And in late, in '42, I signed up with the Naval Reserve. At an office in Oak Park for what it's worth, I still remember the lady's name-- Mildred Mangold. But anyway, at the Fall of '42 I was in the Naval Reserve as a volunteer and then early in '43 I was notified to report to Northwestern for active duty. At that time, I was entered in the V-12 program as an apprentice seaman and I went through my...for two-and-a-half years at Northwestern till early '45. I was...

McDevitt: Well, I don't want to get too far ahead. If you don't mind, I don't want to cut off your track of thought. Did you have to take any examination in the Navy for the V-12 program?

Koblisch: No.

McDevitt: Any tests that you had or did you just selected? They just told you...

Koblisch: No, no, they knew that I had my application that I'm sure showed that I was at Northwestern, at the time. I was put back at Northwestern because there was a V-12 program there.

McDevitt: All right. Because there...wasn't there a large, I don't know, was there a large test? I thought pretty much everybody had to take an examination, right?

Koblisch: No test.

McDevitt: Okay. So you get selected for this program. How much...you were in the Naval Reserve. What were you doing in the Naval Reserves up to this time?

Koblisch: Up till I went to Northwestern? Oh, I was just acting as a civilian. I had gotten out of high school...out of the first year of college. Probably early '43 and I don't know, I just did what a kid did then. Nothing special. And then I went to school at Northwestern and the Navy.

McDevitt: And what were you studying your first year?

Koblisch: Mechanical engineering

McDevitt: Mechanical engineering. Do you think that has to do with, did you just take off after your father? Did you...

Koblisch: My dad was a chemical engineer. I think, I kind of, in a way, an eighteen-year-old kid, what do I know? But I thought I liked mechanical better than chemical, and that's what I gravitated towards.

McDevitt: So you get told, "Hey, your active duty report to Northwestern." Was it June 1st?

Koblisch: I think it was July 1st. My recollection is July 1st, 1943.

McDevitt: What was it like? Was it kind of...what was your housing like?

Koblisch: I was in naval housing. I was in...they were old, the fraternity houses were converted into naval dormitories, but they were...essentially no change. I remember I was in Haven House number sixteen. My room was 305. I remember a lot of things that are not worth remembering, but that's one of them. Yeah, and I didn't...we were allowed to join a fraternity. I joined a fraternity. But there was a lot of activity in the fraternity. I was on the navy program. I studied. I

remember that first day we were going to classes, they said, "We were going to... you're going to go to this place and line up and we'll march to class." Well, that was a complete disaster. After that no more of that. We went to classes on our own. But it was nice experience at Northwestern. We were...a few of our classes had women in them but not many.

McDevitt: And were those women part of like the WAVES program or anything like that?

Koblish: No, no.

McDevitt: Were they civilians?

Koblish: Civilians. They were in civilian classes.

McDevitt: All right. How about your instructors. Who were your instructors, were they just...?

Koblish: They were the same instructors that I had as a civilian at Northwestern.

McDevitt: And did your workload change?

Koblish: I'd say it was comparable.

McDevitt: And how about the...were there added military duties on top of the normal college stuff?

Koblish: Yes. We did have to stand office on deck or OD or something like that, I forgot. I think we, yeah we had to spend shared duties...four hours starting at 8-12. 12-4. 4-6. Something like that. Three to four fellas stood that watch.

McDevitt: What? Patrols?

Koblish: No, no. Just sat there.

McDevitt: And were civilians allowed to come into the barracks?

Koblish: I don't know. I don't recall ever seeing them there. There was a lounge there. But we didn't spend any time in the lounge. We were either in our rooms studying or in class or out running around somewhere. I don't really remember any civilians in there. Even on the weekends, I don't remember any civilians there.

McDevitt: And how about for liberty? What was the liberty schedule?

Koblisch: Usually it started at noon on Saturday and you had to be back Sunday. I think it was late Sunday.

McDevitt: And were you allowed out on school nights? Were people allowed off campus or was it pretty much locked down?

Koblisch: I really don't recall whether we were allowed out or not. I know I didn't do much running around.

McDevitt: Yeah, because it was a pretty heavy work load. What would you say was your normal...can you describe your daily schedule for me? What it would be like, a normal day?

Koblisch: Yeah, we did line up for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We had Reveille call and marched up and our meals were served in the basement of Lunt Building. And then between that we'd be going to class. We'd just walk to our own regular classes like we would if we were civilians. Evenings was usually studying. I don't recall running around doing anything. Maybe we'd go across the street to Scott Hall for...Coke or something.

McDevitt: And how about...what did you guys do for physical training?

Koblisch: We had calisthenics most every morning and I was on the swim team at Northwestern. I swam with the Northwestern swim team. Some of us were civilians and some were Navy.

McDevitt: So you were allowed to join collegiate athletics?

Koblisch: Yes. I should say that there's also a marine contingent there that were essentially the same as we were, only they were marines. We were in the same classes together.

McDevitt: And who were your commanding officers while you were there? Were there a lot of them?

Koblisch: No, there were not a lot. There was, a couple lieutenant commanders, couple lieutenants, I don't remember. We had very little to do with them.

McDevitt: What was their function in your day to day life? Just call Reveille and ensure everyone was present and accounted for?

Koblisch: No. I assume that they were taking attendance in classes, but I don't know that.

McDevitt: Going back to the physical training, who ran the physical training?

Koblisch: It was both Navy people and Northwestern faculty. I remember there was some training, there was physical, I remember. One time I was with a bunch of people and they were teaching us boxing and here's this big lug, he got a hold of me and started punching me around. I thought, "Well, you so and so, I says", but anyway...it wasn't very nice. Wasn't necessary.

McDevitt: Were combative part of the normal...?

Koblisch: There was some ju-jitsu training and but there's some training in the gym. I remember one thing we had to climb a rope up to the ceiling and that kind of stuff. I don't remember, specifically, but I wasn't real interested in that kind of training, I wanted to swim.

McDevitt: Because I know, I think his name was Gene Tawny, was that correct? Wasn't he, if I'm correct, he ran the physical training of the V-12 program from afar for the Navy?

Koblisch: I don't know that. Adolph Kiefer, who I had swum with, he was about six years older than I was, and he became an officer and set up the water safety program for the Navy, is my recollection.

McDevitt: And did you say you have, what was his first name?

Koblisch: Adolph Kiefer. He was an Olympic backstroke champion at Berlin, and he shook hands with Hitler.

McDevitt: So you knew him pretty well. What about the rest of your friends from high school? Did you have a lot of them that were already overseas at this time?

Koblisch: No. Some of them volunteered. I remember one of them was in the Marines [Corps] and he was killed. But most of them...I'm talking the fellas, I don't really remember what happened to the girls, but the fellas were generally pretty good class of guys. And they were focused. They had ambition. And were well educated and a lot of them advanced, not only in the service. I remember a fellow I was in college with, I met him out at Pearl Harbor, and I went to see the Prinz Eugen, the German battleship³that was going to be fitted for the bomb test

³ Jeff's comment: "Prinz Eugen was a heavy cruiser, not a battleship. It came to the US. as a WWII war prize from Germany. My dad told me that the [US] Navy fixed it up so they could blow it up. His friend brought him onboard. Dad told me the ship was built better than our naval ships and commented about the optics on the ship. I don't know if Dad was referring to some viewing device within a gun turret or to the range finder for aiming the guns. He was amazed at how clearly he could see at a great distance. Prinz Eugen was a test ship at tow atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll, but did not sink. It was later towed to Kwajalein where it, eventually, capsized and sank in shallow water."

out in Bikini, I guess it was. He was officer of the deck and I ran across him and he and I had been classmates. And that was interesting. It seemed like he was a guy my age. He had a...some kind of a commission in the Navy, so to answer your question. Yes, a lot of them went into civilian life. A friend of mine turned out to be a doctor and he went to Stanford and he became a very well respected surgeon and I, in fact, I called him up here about six months ago and we had a wonderful conversation. I knew him very well. He and I went to grade school and high school together and knew his wife. But we hadn't spoken for fifty years.

McDevitt: And was he doing the medical part of the V-12?

Koblisch: Oh, no, no. He was at Stanford. This is after he had finished his medical career at Stanford. He was well known as head of the cardiac department and now he's head of some international association of cardiac people or something, I don't know. I remember I called him up the phone and he picked up the phone, said, "Hello. This is Harry." Still the same guy.

McDevitt: And how did you get selected to go into the engineering part of the program, for the V-12?

Koblisch: I don't know that I really...but I already had a year of engineering under my belt and I was sent back to Northwestern. Specifically I suppose, they realized that I had little more to offer than just being a deck swabber.

McDevitt: And what were the...do you remember what the other programs that were offered, for the V-12?

Koblisch: No, specifically I did not. I know some of the classes that I was in where there were other people, who were not engineers.

McDevitt: And what were your...do you remember what the normal classes were? Did you have specific...were there naval courses that they taught you all about the Navy?

Koblisch: There was one naval engineering course that we had...at Northwestern we didn't have anything but academic type courses. There was nothing about protocol and all that stuff for the Navy.

McDevitt: And who was the instructor for that one course? Do you remember? Was it an easy 'A'?

Koblisch: It was easier than the other courses, yes. The instructor, some naval officer, I don't remember who he was.

McDevitt: And how long was a semester? How long was a term?

Koblisch: It coincided with the normal terms that Northwestern civilian students were taking.

McDevitt: Could people fail out pretty easily?

Koblisch: Oh yeah. I shouldn't say pretty easily. I knew one fella that didn't make it. There were not a lot of them. Most of them made the grade.

McDevitt: And did they...because in normal college you have freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, did you have a difference from term to term for you as far as freedoms or whatever?

Koblisch: No, no.

McDevitt: How many semesters did the V-12 program last?

Koblisch: I was there the first year it started. That was...I had my sophomore, junior, and senior year. It was about two and a half years of solid study. There were no long summer vacations.

McDevitt: So you did classes during the summer, as well?

Koblisch: Yes. We maybe had a little time off, but nothing significant.

McDevitt: Were you able to visit your family or did they come up and see you?

Koblisch: Yes. I almost always visited them. They lived in Oak Park and school was in Evanston, Illinois.

McDevitt: What did your family think when you became part of this program?

Koblisch: I didn't get a lot of feedback from them. I think they were very happy I was going to school, as was I. That's my interpretation of what I think that they were thinking. I don't think we ever really discussed it. We all knew it was a good situation.

McDevitt: You were telling me before your father had been in World War I. Did he have any advice for you?

Koblisch: My father was not in World War I. My father was in the SNTC: Student's Naval Training Corps at the University of Michigan.

McDevitt: Oh, I'm sorry.

Koblisch: But he was only there, I think, for one year. He graduated in '21 and he was there I think his senior year.

[Unintelligible interruption]

McDevitt: Really quick, can you introduce yourself.

Jeff Koblisch: This is Jeff Koblisch. You're interviewing my dad, Arthur. I also went to Northwestern so it's sort of interesting for me hearing some of the stories from places, well, I ate at Lunt Hall. But I remember once you told me about that there was a naval gun that they would practice on and it was still there when I went to Northwestern.⁴

Koblisch: No, that gun was not, that was at Columbia, Jeff.

Jeff Koblisch: Oh, was it?

Koblisch: Yeah, yeah.

Jeff Koblisch: So once he got out of college he went off to [United States Naval Reserve] Midshipmen's School in Columbia in New York, then?

McDevitt: Thank you for that. So you're coming towards the end of your time in the V-12 program.

Koblisch: Yes.

McDevitt: Was there any kind of nervous anticipation to think, "Hey I'm going out to the fleet now?"⁵ Did you know where you were going to be headed after you completed your courses?

Koblisch: I'll give you a roundabout answer. I was at Columbia University in [the Naval Reserve] Middie [i.e. Midshipmen] School when the atom bomb was dropped in late 1945. Everybody, they were ecstatic, this is the end of the war and they told us, you're going to be discharged. Not so. A day or so later, "No, fellows, not going to get out. You're going to stay in the service." Well, that was kind of a disappointment because I had been anticipating getting out of uniform. I never

⁴ Jeff's comment: "When I went to Northwestern, NROTC had a naval gun inside a building behind windows that faced the Lake [i.e. Lake Michigan]. When I walked past that building, I always thought it was the gun my dad aimed while he was in naval training. That was why I asked my question."

⁵ Jeff's comment: "As for the 'the fleet', my dad told me his thoughts about being on a ship during the war. If he had to go to sea, he would have wanted to be on an oiler or maybe another supply type ship. He didn't want to be in combat and he felt he would have been less likely to come under fire if not on a combat ship."

really liked the idea of naval protocols and the way things were done...decisions made and I think a minor thing that really irked me, having to salute somebody just because he had brass on a hat and I know he's a no-good so and so. But anyway, that was my reaction at the end of the war.

McDevitt: Did you guys have to wear uniforms to class every day at Northwestern?

Koblisch: Yes, yes.

McDevitt: Which ones were they?

Koblisch: We had the Navy grey uniform, and for labs, we had khaki brownish type uniforms.

McDevitt: And then for physical training, did you guys all wear the same thing?

Koblisch: I don't really know. I don't remember.

McDevitt: You're transitioning from Northwestern. You go to Midshipman School. What were your first days there? Could you describe?

Koblisch: Yes. My first days were on the Prairie State. The Prairie State was the old United States, USS Illinois.⁶ It was parked in the east side of the Hudson River, up at 125th Street, and the superstructure, all the propulsion equipment was removed, and it was just a big hulk. I was only there for four weeks. This is where the gun was. There's a five inch, .38 on the front deck and the bridge north of us was across the Hudson River was the George Washington Bridge and we'd sit in the gun looking through the eyesight's and pretend we were shooting the cars going across the bridge. You want any anecdotes like that?

McDevitt: Yeah, throw them in.

Koblisch: On this scow, the Prairie State, we slept in bunks three high. For some way or other, I got the middle bunk. So some guy's rear end was always hanging down to me and I was looking up at somebody. But...outboard side, there was a big Dutch double door where you could open the top to get ventilation. We were parked across the river from the Palisades Park in New Jersey, and I remember lying in my bunk looking at a big traveling sign there telling me how great Palisades Park was. And the last thing was, "Come on over," and I thought to myself, "Come on over? I can't get out of this G.D. bunk!"

⁶ Jeff's comment: "The Prairie State was originally USS Illinois (BB-7), a member of the Great White Fleet. She was renamed and assigned a new number IX-15, as a housing ship for naval personnel. My dad told me [that] he went to the bow once, and looked down at the "ram" style bow, which was typical of naval ships of her era."

McDevitt: What was your impression of the guys like when you were at Midshipman School? The guys you were going through training with?

Koblisch: Generally, nice guys. I'm talking personality now. I don't think, recall any of them that failed.

McDevitt: Did you make any lasting relationships with any of those guys?

Koblisch: No.

McDevitt: And this was kind of your, you said when you were in the program at Northwestern, you didn't have too much interaction with your higher up, with commanding officers or anything. Did you start to have more interaction at this period of time, and what were your commanding officers like at Midshipman School?

Koblisch: At Middie School...very little, very little contact with them. It was usually on, I think, Saturday morning, we drilled. I think we were there on one Memorial Day where we had a parade and marched down 5th Avenue or someplace. But I had next to nothing to do with any commissioned officers. There were a few student officers but so what? They didn't do much.

McDevitt: So this was a four-week program? What kind of training?

Koblisch: No that four weeks was just the first four weeks. There was a four-month deal. The first month was on the Prairie State, and the last three were at Columbia.

McDevitt: And what was the transition from the Prairie State to Columbia like?

Koblisch: Nothing really, except when we were at Prairie State, we went to our classes in some buildings [that] were just across the dock from the scow that we were on. When we went to Columbia, we went to Columbia classrooms.

McDevitt: And what were they teaching in these classrooms?

Koblisch: Engineering courses. Midshipman, more naval stuff.

Jeff Koblisch: What about the test with the different lights meaning the different things? And no one got the answer right on the test?

Koblisch: Oh yeah...one test they'd flash some lights and say what are these two lights, there were two red lights. I didn't know it. Afterwards, I asked, "What are the two red lights?" "Aw, you dummy, that's a Broadway 7th Avenue Express."⁷

McDevitt: Were you what kind of engineering stuff were they teaching you?

Koblisch: Some Navy stuff. I remember one characteristic, one thing that they taught us was about a governor for some piece of naval equipment...how it would govern the speed of this thing.

McDevitt: So was it all, so this was pretty much your MOS training at this point in time. Was it all engineering for those three, four months?

Koblisch: My recollection is that it was probably heavier on the navy side.

McDevitt: And did you do like navigation?

Koblisch: Yes.

McDevitt: And were you slated to, what were your responsibilities at this time?

Koblisch: To study.

McDevitt: Just to study. Was there, like, fire watch again, or...?

Koblisch: At Columbia?

McDevitt: Yes.

Koblisch: I really don't remember.

McDevitt: Okay. Are there any other stories or anything from your time at Columbia that you think, that kind of stand out in your head?

Koblisch: Yes. They'd march us to church on Sunday mornings. And I thought that was pretty presumptuous. What if you're a Hindu or...?

McDevitt: Jewish?

⁷ Jeff's comment: "When Dad originally told me this story, it was about signals or navigation beacon class. The test had questions about lights in different colors, in different orders, etc., that the Midshipman students needed to know for the Navy. He seemed to think that the person giving the test thought it was a bit of a joke on the students since they had to ride that subway line to get to or from Columbia and that they wouldn't recognize the subway signal lights out of context. He said everyone in the class missed the answer."

Koblisch: Jewish, or something else? I thought that was very inappropriate.

McDevitt: Did they ask you if you wanted to go or not? Or was it form up and march over.

Koblisch: Nope, nope, nope. I always resented that.

McDevitt: Did you ever see; did you ever notice any other things like that? Because were there any African-Americans in the V-12 program?

Koblisch: There was one fellow I recall. His name was Crosby. Yeah.

McDevitt: And he was at Northwestern with you or was he in Midshipmen's?

Koblisch: He was in Midshipmen School.

McDevitt: And did you notice any kind of resentment or racism towards him, or was it we're all in it together?

Koblisch: No, he was only one guy.

McDevitt: What did you think about them, the African-Americans being allowed in during World War II?⁸

Koblisch: It didn't bother me one way or another. I thought this is a scrap that had to be attended to, and we're all in it.

McDevitt: And do you think that was pretty common thought process of the time, for the guys who were in?

Koblisch: I really don't know. I know what my own thoughts were.

McDevitt: How about for women?

Koblisch: We had no WAVES up there even in, as far as I remember, even clerks or nurses.

McDevitt: Are you talking about Northwestern or Columbia?

⁸ Jeff's comment: "The interviewer asked about African-Americans in my dad's unit. I assume that my dad's attitude about racism was being explored. Dad talked to me about some Americans' opinion of the Japanese during the war. He saw the caricatures of Japanese as short, buck-toothed, almost simian copycats with thick glasses. He said people would say they couldn't fight or fly planes well since they were near-sighted. He told me it was amazing to him [to hear these remarks] since the Japanese had been quite successful at that point in fighting the war and had produced the ZERO which was a great fighter plane. He thought that some of the American people underestimated the Japanese and that we would have a tough fight ahead. After the war, we worked with the son of an engineer who designed the cockpit for the ZERO and [he] held no bad feelings toward a former enemy."

Koblisch: Columbia.

McDevitt: How about at Northwestern?

Koblisch: There were women that helped. Yeah. They were, I can remember, they were involved in payroll, I don't remember if they were in the chow hall or not. They were in payroll.

McDevitt: While you're going to school, you're getting news from the war like you said, you heard about the A-Bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Do you remember the reaction? When did you find out that Hitler was dead? When did you find out the war in Europe was over?

Koblisch: Well, D-Day was in the previous year. I'm trying to think...I don't remember specifically when I found out that Hitler had killed himself.

McDevitt: Could you see that...

Koblisch: That the tide was changing?

McDevitt: That the tide was changing?

Koblisch: Absolutely.

McDevitt: What was your news source at the time? Was it mostly the radio or was it newspapers?

Koblisch: Probably both.

McDevitt: And as the tide is changing, really quick let's go back for a second, how much about the war did you know before Pearl Harbor? Were you aware of what Hitler had been doing in Europe?

Koblisch: Are you referring to the Holocaust?

McDevitt: I'm referring to him going into Belgium and his—

Koblisch: I knew specifically when he invaded Poland in September of '39. That was before Pearl Harbor. And yes, I knew not only what was happening in Europe, but I also knew what was happening in the Pacific.

McDevitt: Were you just, did you just enjoy the news? Did you try to stay current?

Koblisch: I wanted to know what was going on.

McDevitt: Did you have any idea that you were going to, in say 1938, 39, 40, did you have any desire to go into the military during that period of time?

Koblish: No.

McDevitt: What was your assessment as the tide of the war is turning, do you remember thinking about the Russian allies that we had? What were the thoughts about Russians at that time? Or what did you think about them?

Koblish: I didn't have a lot of feeling one way or another; however, I did feel that Hitler made a mistake when he attacked them. I was happy to see the Russians get rough with Hitler. I've never been...caught up in a lot of the political or...feelings that had been promulgated upon our people. I've tried to analyze what's really behind them. So, I did not have at that time feelings one way or another until I had admiration for what the Russians what they were going through and what they were doing.

McDevitt: And when did you, do you remember the first time you heard stories about the Holocaust?

Koblish: I don't remember the first time.

McDevitt: Do you remember, did you have any kind of, you know as the news kept coming out about these concentration camps...

Koblish: Well, yeah, I don't remember exactly when but, I knew long before, I wouldn't say, "Long before", sometime before the war was over that there were concentration camps and Jews and other types, people, were being murdered.

McDevitt: When you're coming near the end of your Midshipman School, do you receive orders to go somewhere else?

Koblish: Well, yeah, this was toward the end of '45, the bomb was dropped in '45 and shortly thereafter our time in midi school was over. I was given orders to go to Pearl Harbor and I was given some time at home, I don't remember how much, and I went to spend whatever time, I think I spent Christmas at home. I must've, no, no, I couldn't have because I spent Christmas at Pearl Harbor. I spent some time at home, I flew to San Francisco, spent a few days here, and then took an APA, which is a personnel transport to...it was either Honolulu or Pearl Harbor I don't remember which. But I remember—huh?

Jeff Koblish: Do you know the name of the ship.

Koblisch: Yeah, the *APA 118* and it was Hendry or Henley, Hendry?

Jeff Koblisch: Hendry.

Koblisch: Hendry. It took from Tuesday to Friday to get there and I didn't enjoy that trip. I remember when we left San Francisco, we hit some real rough water. And a lot of the people got sick.

McDevitt: Were you one of them?

Koblisch: No.

McDevitt: And had you spent a lot of time on ships leading up to this like for your midshipman courses, did you guys go out at all?

Koblisch: Oh, we rode a few boats. We took some kind of Navy boat up around Long Island Sound.

McDevitt: Was is similar to the Hendry?

Koblisch: Oh no, no. The Hendry was a Navy ship painted grey. Or blue. But a Navy color. The stuff that we went on in midi school was small time stuff.

McDevitt: And were you excited to be headed out to Pearl Harbor?

Koblisch: Yes. My dad's sister had...we knew about Pearl Harbor the minute it hit because my dad's sister was a sight saving teacher and was in Pearl Harbor and in 1936 or 7 and she knew about it and told us about it. So we had all heard about Pearl Harbor and knew about it.

McDevitt: What were your...real quick to go back, the V-12 program did you have to sign on a contract that says hey, after I finish this program I'll stay in the Navy for such and such amount of time

Koblisch: No. I think it was understood that when the war was over we would be released to inactive duty. That's the way I understood it and I think the other fellows did too. We signed nothing to that respect that we would stay any length of time. I think if you wanted to stay you actually had to make an application because a lot of those people were going to make the Navy their career and had to give them that intention.

McDevitt: Okay, so you head out to Hawaii. It's late 1945. What are your first impressions of seeing Pearl Harbor? You've heard so much about it. You get out there finally seeing it. Can you describe it to me?

Koblish: Well, it was Navy Yard I was anxious to see it and find out what I was going to do, which I did. I was assigned to the machinery ship superintendent's office. It was a lot of USN people in there, not USNR. They were specialists, machinists, engineers, electricians, one guy was specialized in refrigeration and there were probably fifteen to twenty people in there. There was a Navy captain, USN, name was Thorp; he ran the show. He had a very light hand. I hardly ever spoke to him. But as, what I was, I was a representative of the Navy who was supposed to coordinate the work that was being done on the ships, which were Navy with the workforce, which was civilian. And, it was a very light job, really it was, because if there was a problem between the two, we'd just kind of grease the skids and get it solved or somebody if somebody didn't show up to clean the bilges or something, we'd call them to do that or something like that. I had a very, very light schedule.

McDevitt: And what was your rank at the time?

Koblish: Ensign. I had a nice vacation in Hawaii. I really did. I ended up...with a Jeep. When I got there, we were given a bicycle to get around the Navy yard. And soon after that—somehow I got a motor scooter, and I was riding around by dry dock 1 one time and bounced over the railroad tracks and the glass container that contained the fuel filter broke or something, and I think it caught on fire and man, right now, the fire department was there and I sat there looking at the thing thinking I don't know how I got this scooter but I guess I shouldn't have had it. All I remember was that when it was all over I pushed over the edge of the ocean so I didn't have anything but a bicycle for a while. But then there was a guy who was a friend of mine and he was coming in from the forward areas and he was coming in off of an LST and he had a jeep for a while so we had a jeep to ride around in. So the war was over and he was going back home so he gave me the jeep. So I had a jeep to ride around in when I was on liberty. And when I went home, I had remembered my ride over on the APA and I didn't like that, and he worked for the [Army] Air Corps, so when I was through with the jeep, I got a hold of the air corps, "Get me on an airplane home and you can have the jeep." And that's what happened. So I flew back instead of getting on that darned ship coming back. Those are anecdotes.

McDevitt: That's smart, ya know? Work smarter not harder. That's good. So when you were out there, were you the go between? Were these local civilians that you were working with? Were they native Hawaiians?

Koblisch: Both, the skilled people were often not native Hawaiians. There were native Hawaiians there that were more in service jobs.⁹ But there were pipe fitters and welders and electricians, specialists of one kind or another. And the people worked in the office were usually not. The people who answered the phones were not Hawaiian. Probably some but I don't remember the details because these people were over in another building. I hardly ever saw them; I just spoke to them on the phone.

McDevitt: And could you, when you walked around, still see the damage from the attack?

Koblisch: There was a smoke stack that had some holes in the sides that still would puff out smoke occasionally. But other than that there was the Arizona. One time I believe I went swimming by the Arizona, and I recall seeing the bubbles coming up from the holes of the Arizona. But there is nothing like what there is now. I have not been back to Hawaii since I was there, but there was very little talk from people, there, about the damage.

Jeff Koblisch: Was the Oklahoma still capsized?

Koblisch: I don't remember, Jeff. The Arizona is the only one I remember. That was up by Ford Island.

McDevitt: Can you describe what you did for a good time? What did you do for down time when you were in Hawaii?

Koblisch: Particularly when I had the jeep, we would go over to Kailua, through the Pali pass, down the cliff, on the snake road, go over to the Kailua where we would swim. We would go downtown to the officer's club where we would eat and dance. I never drank so I never did that. We would go to P.Y. Chong's, which was a restaurant that specialized in steaks. We would drive around parts of the island, Diamond Head, up around to Coco Head. Sight see. See different things. There was a woman that lived in Honolulu, who my dad dated when he was in high school and he still kept in touch with her. I visited her a time or two. What we did... very seldom went to the movies, except in the evenings we would go to see a movie.

McDevitt: Did you have any interaction, were there any guys working on your post that had seen combat?

Koblisch: If they did—they didn't talk about it. I would suspect that most of them had not.

⁹ Jeff's comment: "The interviewer was asking about native Hawaiians. I believe my dad told me that, sometimes, when a ship went into dry dock and the water was drained out, the Hawaiians would go into the dry dock and get the fish that had been stranded. He assumed [that] they took them to eat."

McDevitt: And how many of the guys from your class at Columbia went out to Pearl Harbor with you? Were there a few? Did you know a couple of people going there?

Koblisch: No. The guys that I went to Pearl Harbor with...there were none from Columbia that I recall.

McDevitt: You were in Pearl Harbor for about a year? Is that correct?

Koblisch: From late '45 to around April, May, or somewhere around there in '46.

McDevitt: What happened in April or May of '46?

Koblisch: I was released from active duty.

McDevitt: Did you just receive a notice in the mail? Did you know that it was coming up? Or was it pretty sudden?

Koblisch: I suspected it was coming up. I probably was told. I got the information when I was working at Pearl Harbor.

McDevitt: You said you traded the jeep and you...

Koblisch: Flew back to San Francisco

McDevitt: Had you been on an airplane before that?

Koblisch: Yes, not in the service, however.

McDevitt: So you fly back to San Francisco. Did your family know that you were out? Were you able to send them a letter or anything? Did they know that you were coming home?

Koblisch: I think I did.

McDevitt: How did you get from San Francisco to home?

Koblisch: I flew on a commercial flight. I remember the one-way ticket was nintey dollars.

McDevitt: When you got back to Chicagoland area, what did you do?

Koblisch: I signed up for another year at Northwestern. I took a post-graduate course. I did not have my degree in engineering degree yet. I had a degree but not in engineering. I finished up, I got my engineering degree.

McDevitt: What was your degree in?

Koblisch: The first one? It was called a Senate degree, it was just...it was not as heavy of a degree as a mechanical engineering degree, which I did get.

McDevitt: Did Northwestern give you credit for all the classes that you had taken there previously?

Koblisch: Oh, yes.

McDevitt: So you had one more year in school to get your engineering degree?

Koblisch: There was hardly anything to complete, which I did, but I took other courses that I found I wanted that I was interested in.

McDevitt: So after you graduate, you finish up your studies, so what came next?

Koblisch: I immediately got a job from, AT, American Can Company. I had a number of choices where I could have. Engineers were much in demand then, but I chose American Can. The first job I had at American Can was up at 1938 N. Clybourn. And then, from there I came down here, and I worked in this building from...1948 to about 1951 or 1952, I don't remember exactly.¹⁰ As I said, I was in the quality control department. I was a divisional inspector. What our job was, was to go out into the can producing plants and look over their practices of keeping cans up to proper standards and quality. Then we would meet with the plant management and make recommendations and write a report to our bosses here.

McDevitt: Did you feel like the military help you prepare for life as a civilian?

Koblisch: No.

McDevitt: Did you meet your wife around this time?

Koblisch: No.

McDevitt: When did you meet her?

¹⁰ Jeff's comment: "When Dad says, "this building", he is referring to the Monroe Building where the Pritzker [Military] Museum [& Library] is located and where he was interviewed. He always admired the esthetics of the building. When I was in grade school, he would walk me through the first floor so I could see the Rookwood tiles and architecture."

Koblisch: I knew her in high school but I didn't like her. [Laughter]. But I came back from the service, when we moved to Oak Park...I looked her up and things clicked.

McDevitt: You were kind of in and out of--Hawaii is pretty different--but did you notice any changes that were going on in society? So many women joined the workforce in World War II...what did you your wife do?

Koblisch: When I met her she was an occupational therapist, and she worked at Hines Hospital.

McDevitt: Was that VA [Veterans Affairs] back then? Did they do a lot of work with veterans?

Koblisch: Yes, in fact, in 1936, I had a high school friend whose father who was the chief boss at Hines Hospital. My wife was out there--I started dating her, I think it was in '47, yeah '47. And then we were married in '49 and shortly thereafter she stopped working and Jeff was born in '52.

McDevitt: Was Jeff your only son?

Koblisch: I had a sister, I mentioned, who died, she was born in '27 and she died, I think, in '73.

Jeff Koblisch: I have a sister.

McDevitt: Was she older or younger?

Jeff Koblisch: Two years younger than I am.

Koblisch: I mistook your question.

McDevitt: That's all right. Then going forward, after your stopped working in this building...

Koblisch: Then I worked in Maywood, [Illinois], for the American Can. I was there 'til 1958, and then I worked in the technical service where I helped with manufacturing problems with can design and quality control. It was kind of a mixed bag. And then in 1958, I went to work for National Can Corporation. And then I started there in their research department, as did several other people that had worked in can companies. And we started their research for them, and I worked there on a number of different projects. I ultimately, I worked a little bit on the development of the aluminum beer can. I was also in charge of the fiber can program. At that time, they got into the spiral round fiber motor oil cans. They were the same size as the present cans but they were spirally wound with

fiberboard and they had metal ends.¹¹ I was in charge of that program and I had a little bit with the installing of the equipment but mostly I had to do with getting them started running. And I set the standards for the cans and inspection procedures and that type of thing. And then I was there 'til 1974. It was interesting. I started with National Can in 1958 and I was thirty-four, thirty-five years old and I worked there for fifteen years and at that time, their program was, when the sum of your age and your years of service equals sixty, you are vested in your pension. So I worked there fifteen years, now I was fifteen plus thirty-five equals fifty. I qualified and two months later, I said, "Bye, bye." And now I get the magnificent pension of 139 dollars and 55 cents a month.

McDevitt: So you retired in '74?

Koblisch: When I was fifty years old.

McDevitt: Did you have any outside hobbies once you retired? What did you do for fun? Did you keep swimming?

Koblisch: You want the long or short answer? I'll give you a medium answer. When I left Northwestern as a swimmer, I asked the coach, "I love to swim. What can I do?" He said, "Why don't you go down to the Illinois Athletic Club right next door?"¹² And that's where I started to swim and, primarily, play water polo and I played water polo for twenty to twenty-five years, I was on many national championships, I was All American [Water Polo] ten to twelve times and I won't tell 'em about the other stuff.

McDevitt: You don't want to brag about yourself too much today?

Jeff Koblisch: I will. The Pan American Games were in Chicago in 1959, I was seven, and I remember watching him march in the entry, start off ceremonies at Soldier Field, and they eventually won a Pan American gold medal in water polo.

Koblisch: As long as we got into that. We should have been the Olympic team in 1956, but very frankly, we were cheated out of it. I will make a short story a little bit longer than it should be. We had a great team, we played Los Angeles in the Olympic tryouts. We ran up big scores against the small teams. Los Angeles played their own second team in the trials and ran up a tremendous score.

McDevitt: So they played their substitutes?

¹¹ Jeff's comment: "Dad was also involved in the developing some of the first pop-up cans. He was granted at least one patent for some of his work, but contractual obligations ceded patents to his employer."

¹² Jeff's comment: "When Dad said, "right next door", he meant the building next door to the building with the Pritzker [Military] Museum [& Library] on Michigan Ave. The Illinois Athletic Club building is now part of the [School of the] Art Institute."

Koblisch: Yes, and they ran up a tremendous score, which they had to get in case the final game became a tie.¹³ They closed the gates, didn't let anybody in to see the game. They raised hell when the second string goalie stopped a first string shot. They ran up, I think it was, a fifteen to two score, which is exactly the score they need to beat us because we were running up big scores against real competition. And the final game, they had a good team, and the final game ended in a tie and they won the Olympic berth on the basis of that rigged game. And that team, they absolutely bombed. They had one guy. They were a good team. They had one center forward--he was a great player but he had no heart. He went over there and some of the guys on our team went, strike: I didn't, I wasn't chosen and this guy wouldn't even chase this guy in the water. Our team got bombed over there.¹⁴

McDevitt: No medal, at all?

Koblisch: No. They were killed. We had a good team and this guy, he just didn't care. He made the team and that's all he cared about. So that's my sad story. That was one of the biggest disappointments in my life. To continue about my swimming--I continued swimming in Masters. In Masters I started swimming in '47, '47 was about the time I finished water polo.¹⁵ I started to swim Masters and I became a pretty good Masters swimmer. Eleven years ago when I was eighty, the national championships for Masters swimming were held in Savannah, Georgia, and Indianapolis, [Indiana]. Long course was in Savannah and short course was in Indianapolis. I won all of my events in Indianapolis in my age group, and I won all of my events in Savannah in my age group. I was the fastest swimmer in the country in my age group and one of the fastest in the world. I made All American in Master's swimming many times over. I don't know how many times. That was the acme of my swimming. In fact, when I swam in Savannah, I was sick. I knew it a couple weeks beforehand but I still swam. I had an autoimmune disease which hurt my strength and I had to take a steroid. Was it a steroid, Jeff that hurt my strength? Yeah, it hurt my strength. I swim yet, regularly, every other day. I can't swim like I used to. If I were to swim in my age group now, I would be a dog. I've only competed twice since I was eighty, in a local meet¹⁶, but there's no one in my age group anymore. Anyway, that is a long answer to your short question about my swimming.

¹³ Jeff's comment: "I believe it was the first gold medal won in water polo by the USA in [an] international competition. He was, also, inducted into the USA Water Polo Hall of Fame, in 1982."

¹⁴ Jeff's comment: "There were enough protests about these Olympic trials -- I have copies of letters that my grandmother wrote to the UDOC [US Olympics Committee] -- that a compromise was made. They took some players from Los Angeles and from my dad's team, the I.A.C, and had them play as the US team in the Olympics. That solution pleased no one and did not lead to success in the Melbourne games."

¹⁵ Jeff's comment: "Dad said he [that] he started Masters swimming when he finished water polo. '47 is, clearly, wrong. I think [that] he meant '77."

¹⁶ Jeff's comment: "I think [that] he meant a local *meet*."

McDevitt: Did you stay in touch with Adolph Keefer after your military service?

Koblish: No, these guys were older than I was.

McDevitt: Did either your son or your daughter serve in the military at all?

Koblish: No.

McDevitt: Would you have objected to it if they had wanted to?

Koblish: No. They were grown by then, they can do what they want. I am free with giving my opinions, which I am sure I would have done. But as you can tell, I am not pro military.¹⁷

McDevitt: To wrap this up, is there any question that you were thinking I was going to ask but I did not ask? Or any little anecdotes or stories that sum up your life in the military that we didn't cover?

Koblish: No, I think I've covered it of anything that would be of real importance to you. I occasionally tried to contact a couple of folks that were in the military with me, but I can't find them. I don't know if they're all living. At my age there is a good change they would not be. I do have one friend from Masters Swimming who I still contact and he is a German, and he was in the German Youth Corps under Hitler and he came over with his family when he was a child. And he still remembers that. And he stayed in the military here and he became a captain and he was in charge of the Amertorp plant out in Forest Park, [Illinois], after the war.¹⁸

McDevitt: So you met through Masters swimming, how did you find out that he had been part of the Hitler youth group?

Koblish: Oh, we talked, sure. Jurgen Schmidt. He was German, and I could speak a little bit of German and he spoke very good English. He has maybe a little bit of a twang but hardly at all. So we became friends, and I spoke with him, here, two or three weeks ago.

McDevitt: That's pretty incredible, too--to meet somebody who's actually part of that. Did he come to the United States right away, like after the war ended? Did his family move over here?

¹⁷ Jeff's comment: "Dad was not against having a military force. He felt it was being used when diplomacy and other means could have been better used with better effect and with less destruction and expense."

¹⁸ Amertorp was a factory that made torpedoes for the Navy in WWII. It was on Roosevelt Rd. and had torpedoes displayed near the road."

Koblisch: He's one year older than me so he was born in '23. I don't know when he came, to be honest. His parents were here with him when I knew him.

McDevitt: I would love to be able to talk to you about that, maybe offline .To sum up, you had a very interesting career. Looking back, how would you describe the V-12 program? Did it seem it was well organized and run effectively? How long did the V-12 program last? Do you remember?

Koblisch: I don't know how long it lasted.

McDevitt: I think it was only in operation for two to three years.

Koblisch: Even that long.

McDevitt: So that is a select group, the qualifications were pretty hard to get in. You had to have aptitude.

Koblisch: We had a number of fellas that came in from the fleet. I have one friend that I occasionally talk to, that came in from the fleet that came into the V-12 program, came in for one semester and he went back to his fleet. I don't know if he was sent back or whether he decided he didn't want it anymore. I think he decided he did not want to go back to V-12.

McDevitt: You had a few guys from the fleet. Did they help you organize your things? Did you have any problems with your uniforms, keeping your uniforms squared away? Did they have any advice for you? In terms of getting used to naval life? The aspects of naval life that you encountered.

Koblisch: No, but I will regress a little bit. When I was at Northwestern, they had an ROTC there. These guys, they thought that they were just the cat's pajamas, but I didn't know that they were an elite corps. So I went to the ROTC officer and I said, "I would like to get in the ROTC." And he said, "Okay, we'll give you a physical exam." When the exam came back, my teeth didn't have the proper bite. He said, "Well, we can't take you because your bite isn't right."¹⁹ I said, "If I get my bite fixed, will you take me?" And he said, "Yes." So I got my bite fixed and came back and said now my bite is correct. And he said, "We can't take you now, you've lost too much schooling." I said, "That's a hell of a thing," and that gave me a sour idea about the Navy right off the bat; however, it was the best thing that happened to me because all those guys in the Navy almost

¹⁹ Jeff's comment: "When Dad went to have his teeth fixed to enter NROTC, he went to a dentist that someone in the Navy recommended. While sitting in the dental chair, he noticed that the dentist's hands were shaking. He didn't know how to handle telling the dentist [that] he didn't want to be treated by him. So, when the dentist turned his back, Dad just got up and ran out. His family found him another dentist who fixed his teeth.

immediately they were pulled out and set out to float around in the water and I went to school.

McDevitt: It's funny the way things work out.

Koblisch: It sure is.

McDevitt: So just an overall view--how would you describe the V-12 program now looking a back at it?

Koblisch: I think it was organized to accomplish what they wanted to do. It was organized and oversaw in a satisfactory manner. I don't have any real criticism about the V-12.

McDevitt: And then how about overall your time that you spent in the military? Did you enjoy it or did you not enjoy it?

Koblisch: I did both, sometimes I enjoyed it. Like I told you, I always had qualms about the military.

McDevitt: Even before you joined, did you have them or no?

Koblisch: Yes, but probably it's grown over the years. Not because of the way the Navy operated or the military, it goes back not really to criticizing the military, but our country has a need for the military. I guess I criticize the actions that our country has taken requires us to have a military. So I think I don't have a real serious qualm about the military. I know that they have been in some shady deals but they probably have been undertaken to further the efficiency of the military group. Probably.

McDevitt: And how about the guys that you served with? I may have asked that already. Did you keep contact with any of these guys?

Koblisch: Hardly with the V-12. I tried to contact a fella that I roomed with at Columbia, but I was never able to reach him.

McDevitt: Well, we may have resources to help you with that. On behalf of Pritzker Military Museum, I would like to say thank you very much. We appreciate your time, incredibly, Arthur. It's been a pleasure. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end this interview?

Koblisch: No, I think you've covered it, and I've tried to give you things that would be helpful and interesting to fill out the interview. I think when you talk with my son

he can give you a little more about that incident about a family relative that was in the First World War in France.²⁰ I think you'll find it very interesting, okay?²¹

McDevitt: Thank-you very much.

²⁰ Jeff's comments: "The family member in WWI was my mom's father, Paul A. Olson. He was in 108th Engineers, Co. B. in the 33rd Division. That division was the Illinois National Guard, activated for the war. He told me about a bridge his group had to build for American troops to cross a creek for an attack. They worked all night, under fire, but the bridge was not quite ready in time. The engineers then stood in the creek and supported the bridge with their shoulders for the troops to cross. The attack was on Sept. 26, 1918, as part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. From his memorabilia, I was able to locate the site near Forges-sur-Meuse in north-eastern France. I have visited the site and was greeted with great warmth and appreciation from the local people for the efforts we made on their behalf a century ago, this month."

²¹ Jeff's comment: "The family member in WWI was my mom's father, Paul A. Olson. He was in 109th Engineers, Co. B. in the 33rd Division. That division was the Illinois National Guard activated for the war. He told me about a bridge his group had to build for American troops to cross a creek for an attack. They worked all night, under fire, but the bridge was not quite ready in time. The engineers then stood in the creek and supported the bridge with their shoulders for the troops to cross. The attack was on Sept. 26, 1918, as part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. From his memorabilia, I was able to locate the site near Forges-sur-Meuse in north-eastern France. I have visited the site and was greeted with great warmth and appreciation from the local people for the efforts we made on their behalf, a century ago."