Charles “Milo” McLeod: Today is June 1, 1985. I’m Staff Sergeant Milo McLeod doing an oral interview with Colonel Joe Upshaw. Also present are Sergeant Orlin Snyder (?) and First Sergeant Howard Anderson from 103rd (unintelligible). Colonel Upshaw, you and I have discussed the written release for the oral history interviews, and you are aware that in the future sometime this information may be available for research by other parties.

Joseph Upshaw: I am.

CCMM: You have no objections to that.

JU: No objections.

CMM: When did you first join the National Guard, sir?

JU: I joined in 1936.

CMM: That was the Chinook Unit?

JU: We were the Chinook Unit. The M Company at that time.

CMM: That was the 163rd.

JU: The 163rd. The infantry regiment at that time.

CMM: You stayed in the National Guard until they were activated in 1940 with the regular army?

JU: Right, we were activated on September 16, 1940 for one year duty. Of course, that turned into five or better years.

Unidentified Male Speaker: I think it would be quite a surprise to be activated.

JU: No, it didn’t. We could feel it coming because the situation in Europe was quite a buildup. (unintelligible) starting in, probably, 1938. Of course, at that time, we didn’t have much
equipment. We had very little equipment. There was no money put into the military. The regular army had very few people in it, really. We could see it coming. People were getting into two sides as to whether we should be an isolationist type country or not.

I remember Burton K. Wheeler was our senator; he was an isolationist. However, on the other side, we had our people who felt the other way and knew that the war was inevitable, not particularly with Japan, but in Europe. Leading up to this thing, we knew that something was coming. The congress was...We had just gotten out of this big Depression and there wasn’t much money. Congress had very little money to put into the army and especially into the reserve deployments. As time went along...as I’ve said a couple of times before, we knew it was inevitable. We went to Fort Lewis for our training in 1937 for three weeks. Three weeks. That was unprecedented: a three week camp.

UMS: That was kind of uncommon, wasn’t it?

JU: Right. That was a good indicator that the intelligence had the information that they knew things were coming, more than the general public did or would admit. We operated out there in conjunction with the Fort Lewis people. The 3rd division was important at that time and the 41st. We maneuvered against each other. In 1938 we had our annual training here and in 1939, within only this area adjacent to the fort now.

CMM: You’re speaking about Fort Harrison.

JU: Fort Harrison, yes. Of course, we didn’t need much room. We didn’t have...at the first camp I was at, we had only one or two trucks that were used to haul garbage. We had the first one or two...in 1936 (unintelligible) the fort in Butte. (unintelligible) They were down by the...I don’t know what you call it now. They shot. It used to be the youth shot.

CMM: The youth shot.

JU: Above the big old belt. Practical.

CMM: What was it used for?

JU: Machine gun carts. We had the water coolant machine guns. You could mount them on the cart. In later years, we just pulled them ourselves. We started earlier...here we’re mixing in some of the other stuff with the history. We had a straw pile. We had to go down and get our straw takes. That was probably the first thing we did, replacing the bedding for the mules.

Anyway, getting back to the story on the buildup for the war; we had our annual field training here at Fort Lewis in ’38 and ’39. In 1940, we went out to Fort Lewis again. That was a very large scale maneuver for that time.
CMM: In 1940, was it annual training?

JU: It was annual training, yes. It was all annual training up until that time. Toward the tail end of the period, they marched the whole division together. By marching...we had no transportation of anything. The regiments were in various places in distant parts. It was quite a march to bring them all into one central place, so that the general could talk to us. He told us at that time that the 41st division had been selected for call up. This was in August of 1940. The general told us that we were being mobilized in September for one year of duty. That was the first time that we had officially known.

CMM: How did he know...he told you August?

JU: He told us in August, yes.

CMM: So the September 16th order wasn’t a surprise, then?

JU: No, it was not a surprise. It was just about a month and a half. Adderley (?) called the officers together first and told them. Naturally, they were not allowed to discuss it with anyone. They knew it about the first day of...

CMM: You were an officer at that time.

JU: No, I was a PFC [Private First Class]. At that time, we knew we were going to be mobilized. We came home and went about our business. We assembled in the armory the morning of September 16th, 1940. At that time, it was hard for people to realize that this was serious business. At least some people felt that they were quite a threat to us. In 1940, they were getting pretty tough over in Europe.

CMM: How did most people at Chinook or Havre or the units in Montana feel about being mobilized? Did it take them by surprise?

JU: The full impact of impending war had not hit yet. I don’t think a lot of us really gave it any much deeper thought. Maybe we should have. You got to remember that we were...I was 20 years old. A lot of men there...here you were supposed to be 18 to join. Of course, a lot joined at 14. They lied. I joined at 16.

CMM: My father was in the Washington National Guard in Centralia. He used to drill out...go to summer camp out at Fort Lewis. He joined the Washington Guard at 16...15 and a half. What kind of people joined the Guard?

JU: I should just discuss the unit that I was in and then I can maybe go out from there. When the call came...before the call up. Let’s go back to ‘35. It seemed to me that the people in the Guard joined usually in high school. It was good. If he was a private, he got a buck a drill; or a
buck a day for active duty. I know, myself, I used that money. I raised enough to buy my high school graduation suit. There wasn’t much money around. That was a good little source of income. There was a good spirit among the people, more so than there is now. The people who joined the Guard...it was something where you got together and you got to know each other very well. When you took the uniform off at the end of the drill—we drilled on weeknights—you’d get together and talk shop, talk Guard talk, and everything else.

When we were mobilized, ordered to mobilize, there was an intensive recruiting program that started. In this town of Chinook...in Harlem [Montana]...There was a portion of the company that was in Harlem, a portion in Chinook. I don’t know how many people started when...we had 75 to 80, equivalent to two units. 80, just a guess. There were two portions of the unit. They really recruited. They recruited heavily on the Fort Belknap Reservation. They got a lot of Indian people. They recruited a lot farm kids. It is mainly a farm community. There’s a lot of them around. It was a real good cross section of the little community of Chinook and Harlem: people from the business community and this and that.

They ended up in this particular unit with 158 people. That is a lot of people to draw out of Blaine County. We had the largest company in the state. We didn’t have...as an example, the I Company was in Great Falls. They didn’t have any Indians—reservation type Indians. They didn’t have too many farming types. They recruited within...they got a lot of people from...went down to the jungle, in fact, and got some.

CMM: The jungle...?

JU: The hobo jungle. That type. There were a lot of hobos around, being right after the Depression. Some of those companies had people in there that were real good people, but others were not. They were...

CMM: They were a more transient population.

JU: Yes. Later on, this showed up. Each company, due to the type of people they recruited, had different problems. The I Company had winos and so forth. They had gotten that type of people, and they created a problem. In our own company, there was a cultural difference between the Indians and the whites. That was quite a difference.

CMM: What was the breakdown, just roughly, in the percentage of Indians to whites?

JU: I don’t know. We probably had...

CMM: Half and half?
JU: No. We probably had 30-35 Indians. When you get into that type of community, you have people who are half and half. I don’t know whatever side that would be on. Let’s take another unit: Poplar [Montana], B Company. It had almost entirely all Indians. It had Indian officers.

CMM: Really?

UMS: Indian officers, really?

JU: Yeah, Captain Duncan Dupree was killed in New Guinea. He was an Indian.

CMM: What was that?

JU: Duncan Dupree. We had other ones down there. I wouldn’t say 100 percent Indian, but they were majority Indian. This might be interesting in your story that E Company of the 163rd was from Wolf Point. They never reorganized Wolf Point after the war. That’s how Havre ended up with it.

CMM: What happened to E Company during the war? From Wolf Point?

JU: E Company was...It’s on the reservation, but on the periphery of it. They had a large number of Indians in their company. The reason that E was not reorganized at Wolf Point, I don’t know. Now we’re talking about 1947. We’re skipping a few years. When it was time for the Guard to reorganize again, there were few people in these communities that came back. Some had had enough of this war business and some wanted to continue. Evidently, no one from Wolf Point actually got active in asking for a unit. I know in the Chinook unit, we had got it started, Carl King and myself. Carl was also a long time member of the company. We came to Helena and talked to the general and told him we would really like to have a company, being known as a real good National Guard community in Chinook. We were known for having so many people come up through the years. We were given a company. Actually, Chinook had been a heavy weapons company.

CMM: Machine guns?

JU: Machine guns and mortar...

CMM: Was that the normal way in which a unit would organize? The interested party from small towns would go to Helena?

JU: Yes.

CMM: They would sort of petition or request?

JU: Yes. (unintelligible) There were economic and political reasons for doing this.
CMM: Chinook had a WPA [Works Progress Administration] armory built in ’40 or ’41?

JU: It was completed in about ’38.

They gave us a company, but they didn’t give us the tank company and a regimental combat team. As I was saying, they just about had to be petitioned or something because if the interest wasn’t there...you had to find some ideal company commander. We had everything we needed. I had an interest in building these...maybe this isn’t interesting...

CMM: Yes.

JU: Building these WPA armories, they had to have big matching funds. During that early period, pre-construction period of the armory in Chinook, each man in the unit was asked to contribute one day’s pay per month. That was part of the matching funds. I said earlier I was a PFC. I was a corporal at that time. They got a dollar and a quarter, 1.35 dollars. If you were a PFC, you got 1.15 dollars. You got an extra dime if you were a specialist—a machine gunner. You were a gunner instead of an ammunition carrier or loader. Anyway, you’d put in one drill per month in the construction of the armory’s matching funds. Later on...

CMM: How did that go over with the troops?

JU: They were in the Guard for something a little bit more than the buck. The spirit was there. It was more evident—far more evident—than it is today. So we had our armory.

We were talking earlier about the make-ups of these companies. Another interesting thing in the Chinook era, the early mobilization era...we went into the armory on September 16th. At that time, there were a lot of decisions to be made. Number one, you had to be 18 years old. We had to throw everyone out under 18.

You had to have a physical. There were a lot of people in there who had been getting along quite well who were not physically ready. We lost some very good people. We lost a lot of people. We had 158 that went to Fort Lewis, but we lost 20 of them probably. We had 175 or better actually on board. By minority, by dependency, by disability, it eliminated quite a few. Having a lot of Indians in there...I think the Indians realized probably more of the upcoming war than anyone else. The interesting thing...

CMM: Why would that be?

JU: I don’t know. Maybe Indians think war more than the whites do. The old time Indians, who were parents of these people and their relatives, they were outside the armory. A lot of them had come to Chinook and stayed there. At night, they were outside the armory. We couldn’t go
outside. We had to stay in. During the night, they were chanting...war chants and all of that, outside the armory. That was just fine timing.

CMM: This was the night before you—?

JU: Hell, during that week, while we were...we stayed in Chinook for about a week during this mobilization staging time. We were moving to Fort Lewis.

CMM: The elders and the chanting, did it last just one night?

JU: No, every night. There we were, sleeping in the armory on the floor. We didn’t have any cots or anything. Our training amounted to about two things. We had a mortar platoon, but we didn’t get mortars for six months, or eight months. It was after mobilization before we even got our 81 millimeter mortars. We had to use fence posts and stuff for (unintelligible). Our training consisted mainly of machine gun drill and mortar drill and also the reading of the articles of war. Those were required things at that time.

Machine gun drills. You get on the armory floor, on the ground, and simulate moving a machine gun up to a unit position by crawling up like when you’re under fire and getting it set up. You do that over and over again. Then, stripping and assembling a machine gun. That was a time test. Everyone could do it blindfolded in a matter of seconds. The details for the machine gun and the name of the parts.

CMM: These are the old Browning water coolant machine guns?

JU: About 1917 A1 belt fed, recoil operated, water coolant. I can quote that because everyone in our company had to know the first eight pages of the machine handbook by heart. We weren’t too technical, but, by God, we were thorough.

CMM: Do you know why Havre did not have a National Guard unit?

JU: I cannot specifically say, but like I talked you before, Havre is a railroad division town. I imagine that they didn’t have a company for the same reason that Butte never had a company for a good many years. Back in the days of the Wobblies, there was labor unrest in Butte. They called up the National Guard and the National Guard got the name of strike breakers as far as they were concerned there. Naturally, they were unpopular in Butte. It would have unpopular in Havre for the same reason.

CMM: Because of the heavy industry?

JU: The heavy railroad industry.

CMM: And the strong union—

Joseph Upshaw Interview, OH 150-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
JU: —community in town. Of course, there was other towns in Montana of some size that didn’t have units too that didn’t have labor, so there might have been other reasons.

CMM: You were mentioning several towns like that. Glendive, for instance, they were a large railroad—

JU: There’s a railroad freight industry—

CMM: They didn’t have one for a long time. You mentioned Havre, another railroad town on the line of the Great Northern. Butte. What about Billings?

JU: Billings had two units. They were large enough. That was no problem there. Livingston was (unintelligible). It had a unit. Some of them did, some didn’t. Livingston had quite a farming community around there too. Anaconda didn’t have a unit.

I know where all the units were. Sidney was A [Company]; B was Poplar; C was Bozeman; D was Harlowton; E was Wolf Point; F was Kalispell; G was Glasgow; H was Billings; I was Great Falls; L was Billings; and M was Chinook. That leaves out a lot of towns of pretty good size, but they had one...they had a tank unit in Livingston. Helena had a headquarters and Bozeman had a service (unintelligible).

CMM: Didn’t they have a medical detachment in Kalispell?

JU: Whitefish.

CMM: Whitefish. How about Missoula?

JU: Missoula had no Guard.

CMM: No Guard. Missoula had no Guard. That’s interesting. But they had an active duty post with Fort Missoula.

JU: Right. Then, of course, they had an ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] unit.

CMM: ROTC.

JU: It was the reserve headquarters for the state, too, I think. They might have had some barracks.

CMM: I’ve never gotten the feeling that Missoula was really anti-military.
JU: No, it wasn’t. I’ve never thought too much about why Missoula did not have a unit, but probably with the university there, the ROTC, and the reserve headquarters for Montana was out there at the Fort.

CMM: At Fort Missoula.

JU: Fort Missoula, yes.

CMM: It probably absorbed all of the military interest there.

JU: Whitefish had its own medical unit. They had a 116th quartermaster unit in Boulder. There’s still a lot of interest in these communities in our 163rd association, especially in the smaller towns.

UMS: Harlowton (unintelligible)

JU: Isn’t that something how they (unintelligible) up there? We have an organization up here in... just a group of us. We get together a lot. We come from all over. Mike McKinney (?) was from E. I was from M. Marty Settle (?) out here is from D. Of course, Taylor was here...

CMM: You mentioned that E became Havre. Is that what you said?

JU: Correct.

CMM: E was at Wolf Point—

JU: At the time the Montana National Guard was organized after the war, it didn’t mean that all the units were functional. They kind of came in one at a time. Some way or other... I wish I could remember the name. I think it was Barney Balch (?) was one of them up there.

CMM: Was that Balch?

JU: I believe he was the first commander of the Havre unit. Have you got anything on that?

CMM: No, I don’t.

JU: I may be wrong in who it was, but I know that he came from a family of some political power. (unintelligible) When it became evident that Wolf Point did not want the unit—

CMM: I should say, when there was interest in Havre... I think you mentioned something in a previous conversation about Chinook... I might be wrong, but Chinook acted as something of a mother unit. They sort of sponsored... maybe those aren’t the right terms. They sponsored or acted as a mother unit for the company E.

Joseph Upshaw Interview, OH 150-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
JU: I’m afraid that there might be some people in Havre who would disagree.

CMM: That’s okay. There’s no problem with that.

JU: Let’s go back then. In the mobilization of 1940. Some were Havre people in the Chinook unit. We had a number of people out of Havre.

CMM: They went from Havre and commuted to Chinook.

JU: Commuted to Chinook. When we were reorganized in ’47, again we picked up a number of Havre people.

CMM: When you’re saying reorganized...in Chinook.

JU: In Chinook.

CMM: Reorganized in ’47.

JU: Yes. I can’t give any date on that.

CMM: The year’s fine.

JU: We recruited people out of Havre. We had a number of them. Later on, when Havre first...when were they reorganized?

CMM: Nineteen forty-nine.

[End of Side A]

Note: Interview likely continues on Side B of the cassette tape, but that part of the tape is inaudible.