**Transcript: Norman Witzsche**

*Today is Friday, May 20, 2011. My name is James Crabtree and today I'll be interviewing Mr. Norman Witzsche. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. Mr. Witzsche is at his residence in north Austin. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Mr. Crabtree, thanks a lot for helping out. I do have a hearing deficit as a result of something I carried back from the Army.

*Yes sir. Understood. Well, like I said, if you need me to speak any louder, sir, just let me know and I'll do so.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Thank you.

*Sir, the first question we always start these interviews with is tell us a little bit about your boyhood and your childhood before you went in the military.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, I grew up on a farm. We were short on help and money so I did a poor job in school. Just for the records. But I did get a GED. And then my class, we had regular reunions after the war with my class. We got an unusually bright boy, Stubby Lund. He's six foot six. He declared that they issue me a . . . They wanted to get me to graduation. My class graduated but ol' Norman didn't make it. It wasn't because I couldn't make the grades but I had obligations that I couldn't make it.

*Where did you grow up?*

**Norman Witzsche:** In Hamilton County. Right here in Pottsville.

*Hamilton, Texas?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I have a brother. No sisters. My brother, he was about two years younger than I am and he graduated.

*So you lived on a farm and worked on a farm growing up. Were you in high school when World War II started?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah, well, no, I was working in the aircraft industry.

*Okay. Tell us a little bit about that.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, I heard of these good jobs in California. Three dollars and a quarter an hour, and just come out and go to work. And I went out there and it was the best job I ever had up to that time.

*What airline company or manufacturer?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Consolidated Aircraft of San Diego, California.

*Yes sir. And what type of airplanes did you work on?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I got to work on the first one of the B-24s and the PBYs that they manufactured.

*That's great. What was the typical day like for you? Did you work an eight-hour shift?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, we got all the hours we wanted to stay there. There was heavy demand for 'em. They was trying to get 'em ready to use 'em to run the bombing runs of Japan and also of Germany.

*So you moved out to San Diego and started working there?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. I worked and lived out there. Room and boarded. There was about six or seven of us boys from this part of Texas that went out there, sooner or later wound up there. And we started having reunions. We had 'em for 30-something years. Us boys would meet every year. Go up to Lake Whitney.

*That's great. What was your role in the assembly plant? What was it that you did?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Outside of being at home and working on the farm, I got that time off to make that reunion. We'd have it up at Lake Whitney every year.

*Yes sir, that's great. So I was going to ask you, what did you do at the manufacturing plant? What was your role on the assembly line?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I was a riveter and basically anything. The term was called the "fuck-up crew." Ha! Ha! We cleaned up everything that was messed up. At that time they started hiring lots of ladies. I better call 'em women. They'd knock holes in the side of that ol' B-24 and we was working on the nose of it. And they'd knock holes in it and they'd mess up the riveting and that's what we did. There was no discredit to the ladies. They did one heck of a job to help us get ready for what was going to be the major drive on Germany. With the B-24s and the PBYs.

*Was it hard work?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No, it wasn't hard work for a farm boy. It was mainly, our job, my job, was to find what was messed up in the nose part of the ship, aircraft, and repair it. I enjoyed it very much 'cause, man, I had never seen that much money in my life, and I'm not settin' down there like a banker. We started to work, just come out there and fall in for three and a quarter an hour. That was in the '30s.

*How long did you end up working at the factory? Were you there for a couple of years?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes, about four years. I left as a result of a tragic storm at home, here in Hamilton County. My parents' home and all their buildings were wrecked in a hurricane, a tornado, whatever you want to call it. So I came home to help them clean up the loss. I talked to the draft board. See they'd keep a-callin' me but I was declared essential. They asked Daddy, they'd say, "What's happened to Norman? We've called him three times and he hasn't appeared

yet." Daddy said, "I can't tell you." He just said something that he was in an essential position. In the end, I was called. They gave me a couple of months to help Mom and Daddy kinda clean up the farm. Things straightened around for 'em and then I was drafted.

*Do you remember, did you get a draft notice, a telegram?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh yeah, and the draft board, you know in these little country towns, everybody's acquainted. They came out and talked to me. I said, "Well, all that I ever was told to do, if I get a draft call, to turn it in to our office and they would suspend the call." But when I quit to stop and help Mom and Daddy on the farm, they said, "We'll give you a month here to help and the we got to put the draft call on you." I said, "I understand." And that's when I got called and I went to the infantry, and from the infantry, I was put on detached service because I was a farm boy. That was the only reason they could tell me. So I'd go into training pack mules. That was an interesting treat for me because them mules was all young and they were basically a 17-hand mule. That means a 17-hand horse is a big horse. So a 17-hand mule is a big animal. From there, we trained these mules, they were all three years or younger. We trained these mules to be pack mules. Trained means they follow each other wherever the leader goes.

*Do you think they picked you for that, sir, because of your time having been on a farm?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No, but we have got an opportunity through several different sources, to get some pictures.

*I guess my question is, you got drafted into the Army, and they knew you were a farm boy, was that part of the reason why they assigned you to work with the pack mules?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. That was the only reason. Ha! And I hadn't farmed a mule in my life! But they said, "Okay, you was worked with horses." We had basically 15 head of horses on the farm at home and I'd worked with horses. They said, "You qualify to be a trainer in this pack mule thing." We was to go up in the Alps in northern Italy and that was the way we was to enter into Germany. It was an interesting thing for this ol' farm boy. Yeah.

*To back up a little bit, when you got drafted, where did they send you to boot camp?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I went to, lordy, one of the training camps here in Texas. From there, I moved around to several places. Then when this thing began to materialize with the mule training, why, they sent me up to camp in Oklahoma. My old memory. I'll think of it later, sir.

*So you were in Oklahoma when you were working with the pack mules?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*Did you enjoy it?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh yeah, and one of the best lessons that I ever got, and they told us this very clearly and I repeated it numbers of times. Don't ever get behind one of these animals if you can't see their eyeballs.

*Yeah. They'll kick you, right?*

**Norman Witzsche:** You're not kidding, they'll swap ends with you. I remember I saw one of the boys, his name was Johnson. He was from up in north somewhere. Hadn't ever seen a pack mule before. And I watched him, and he walked in behind him and that mule hit him right across the mouth. He had a single ring below his nose to his chin. But he was about two inches short on his kick. The kid just kinda flopped his head back and turned a flip and got up and got out of there.

*He was lucky he didn't get his head knocked off. Those things are strong.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah. If he'd a-been three inches closer, that mule would've swapped ends with his head and his feet.

*I think you could conceivably be killed by one of those if you got hit in the head right.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh yes. That is true, sir.

*So you knew enough, though, not to walk behind any of them, I guess?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No! I knew that from experiences with horses. You know, we made up the convoy, which I was told, and I'm sure it's all correct, that it was the biggest armada of ships that ever crossed the Atlantic.

*Interesting.*

**Norman Witzsche:** And it made up in South Carolina. And we started overseas and it was 35 days from leaving there to unload the mules in Italy.

*How many mules did your unit take over?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I think there was something over, five boat loads, something nearing 2,000. And I'm not correct on the number.

*But you think somewhere around 2,000 mules?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah, in that particular convoy. I think there was sixty-five hundred mules that was taken over there eventually.

*The mules were to be used to carry supplies, is that right?*

**Norman Witzsche:** They carried supplies, yeah. You could buckle a M1 Howitzer and enough ammunition on a mule to do a pretty good battle out of whatever secluded area that you wanted to work from.

*Sure. You mentioned before that these mules were to be used in the Alps of northern Italy.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*Tell us about arriving in Italy with the mules and what you guys did.*

**Norman Witzsche:** You know what? They came and disbanded us just before we left on that trip. We were disbanded because Germany had folded.

*Okay. So the war had ended by the time you got there?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. It was five boatloads of mules in that one convoy. So, they were coming in all the time.

*Tell us then, sir, how you learned that the war had ended. Were you on the convoy when you learned that the war was over?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*You were.*

**Norman Witzsche:** It was right after we had unloaded the mules and that's when the word came out. I'll never forget the Stars and Stripes came out and we was up on the top deck and here comes, they was just honkin' the horn and wavin' their arms and their papers that said Japan had accepted the armistice terms.

*Germany had surrendered.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, Germany had already folded before that.

*Oh, so you were in Europe when Germany had already surrendered and Japan was still fighting?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes.

*Okay.*

**Norman Witzsche:** You know it's hard to remember 'cause that wasn't the main thing that was on our mind. The mules and things, the fact that the war was going to end, and a lot of things I've forgot since then.

*Yes sir. So when they sent you to Europe, had Germany already surrendered?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, no. Germany surrendered, I'll never forget. We were just going through the Straits of Gibraltar with this convoy. Germany had accepted the armistice terms.

*That's great. So you were going through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean, into Italy, when you guys got that word?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*That's great. So what did you do then? You went on to Italy?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. The convoy continued in, and our ship landed at the Port of Rome called Civitavecchia, Italy, I believe is correct. That's where we ended and I'll never forget this. There were five freighters that I could see when we got into that port that were either the back end sticking out of the water or the front end sticking out of the water, ship laying over on its side, and our ship taking quite a while and a lot of maneuvering for him to get it to the dock. We unloaded those mules at Civitavecchia, Italy, I think is correct. We unloaded them with cargo nets. And the cargo nets were made out of rope. And we'd leave two mules side by side. The cargo net was laid down and we'd lead these mules over the top of that cargo net. And the stevedores would pick it up and the mules' legs would go through the holes in the roping that

was put together and they just raised all kind of hay. And still, they swung 'em over the side of the ship. And at that time, them mules was about 60 to 70 feet off of the dock. And they, I really admired this, how smart they was. When they saw how high they were up in the air, most all of them just melted down like a kitty. And they swung 'em over on the dock and dropped them down and they walked out and they were real behaved when they got out on the good ol' solid Mother Earth, the dirt. And they did some things. They jumped and expanded that air that they had collected while they was up in there and they knew they was on solid Mother Earth. It was amazing. It tickled me to watch how they'd melt away. We had something about 500 and some mules on the ship that I was on. I'd like to make one more comment about that ship.

*Yes sir.*

**Norman Witzsche:** We had to stand guard every other night to see that them mules were taken care of. I was the only farm boy in three hulls in that ship that had any experience with a four-legged beast of burden. None of 'em, including me, had ever worked with mules. Ol' Norman, he had to stand guard every other night and ol' Norman didn't get any sleep for two weeks. I finally introduced them boys to a five-pronged pitchfork. I said, "See this five-pronged pitchfork? The next time you see a mule fixin' to get out . . ." Because if he got down, it'd taken quite a number of days to get their legs back. We'd hang 'em in a swing and let 'em get their legs back. We had mules hangin' all over that ship trying to get their legs back. If I could prevent 'em from getting down, we saved all that time. Up 'til that time, about two weeks on that convoy, I didn't get to sleep day or night. And I introduced the boys to that five-pronged pitchfork, and I said, "Here's what you going to keep your mules from getting down." And it worked.

*So if the mules laid down or sat down, they wouldn't get back up?*

**Norman Witzsche:** They'd get down and folded their legs up, you know. They stood on 'em for two weeks or more and their legs folded under 'em, and when we picked 'em up, their legs were just, the knees was, the legs were bent up at the knees, and it'd take several weeks to get their legs back. First off, you hung 'em in a swing and their legs were folded under. It was hard to get them to get their legs in a standing position so they could start circulation in 'em to get 'em goin'.

*So, I see what you're saying. So their legs would kind of go to sleep or go numb or something?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah. Very, very interesting. This ol' farm boy. I learned a lot in that little ride.

*How much did you have to feed the mules?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, they had a given amount of feed, and usually they eat it all up. If they didn't we'd cut it back the next time. We watered 'em and we fed 'em out of the same trough which was hung on their stall. It didn't take them long to learn what time it was and they, you know, well behaved. I tell you, the mule is claimed to be the dumb animal, but he's smart. I never had, I drove one team of mules in my life. On the farm, we worked on a tractor crew and I had a team of mules. They needed an extra team, a rope, a wagon, so the boss, Mr. Kinsey, said, "Norman, go get them mules and let's show these boys how to haul loads." And they were all the mules in that convoy, I guess in that government issue, were 17-hand mules. You know anything about measuring horses and mules?

*Yes sir. You put the hands one on top of the other along the side of the horse, right?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Right.

*So I know 17 is quite . . .*

**Norman Witzsche:** To qualify for that, they had to a 17-hand mule.

*That's definitely a good size.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That's a big mule.

*A mule is a cross between a horse and a donkey, is that right?*

**Norman Witzsche:** That's correct. And they're pictured as a dumb animal but don't kid yourself. They are very intelligent. And when they learn, you learn them how to trail. That means follow the horse, the mule ahead of you. I don't care how small that trail is. If the other mule went across it, they made it too.

*That's interesting.*

**Norman Witzsche:** You buckle one of them M1 Howitzers on the back of a mule with ammunition, they got a pretty heavy load.

*How much weight do you think they could carry maximum?*

**Norman Witzsche:** You know I've thought about this, and this is strictly a guess but it has to be several thousand pounds.

*Really? Wow.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That Howitzer is a big, big gun. That muzzle on that thing and its barrel, that is a load within itself.

*They definitely could carry a lot.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That's right. My daddy was in the Army, World War I, and he told me about how they carried shells for that M1 Howitzer. My daddy's a small guy and he could carry them shells. They must have been pretty heavy. He's talking about them big guys, and big guys, they'd have to sit down and rest a while. They did a lot of, you know, carrying 'em by hand.

*Did you, sir, ever read the story that Ernie Pyle wrote about Captain Waskow?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No sir, I didn't.

*He was a captain in the Army that was killed in Italy in World War II, and I remember in that story, it's a pretty famous story that Ernie Pyle wrote. In that story Captain Waskow and others that had been killed in that battle were brought down the mountain by mules. And so I remember that story stood out, that they used those mules to transport them.*

**Norman Witzsche:** If you guys can give me that information, I'd love to have it.

*Yes sir. I'll send you the . . . I'll find it somewhere and print it out and send it to you. It's a . . . of course, Ernie Pyle was a great writer and it's a moving story. And that part I remember he describes how they brought Captain Waskow and some others that had been killed, brought them down off the mountain on a mule.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. And you know getting acquainted in the Italian communities while we was moving them mules from port, there's a port, golly, the port of the Catholic headquarters.

*Oh, in Rome?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah.

*The Vatican?*

**Norman Witzsche:** The Vatican. And I, after the war was over with, I got as far as northern Italy when we disbanded the mules. But I went to see everything I could. The leaning tower of Pisa, the Vatican, the catacombs, the underground cemeteries.

*That's great.*

**Norman Witzsche:** I would not take for them scenes that I got to look at.

*Sure. Were the people in Italy friendly towards you?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. Yes sir, they were just beautiful. And it was very evident that the war was soon over with. In fact, while I was there is when they came and declared that the war was over with. It was a very exciting time for me 'cause I had a wife and the first son at home.

*Oh, okay, yeah.*

**Norman Witzsche:** And the son, he went to the Army of the, what was the little crisis we had between where we are now and from the World War II in northern Europe and Italy and that area? He was in that Vietnam thing.

*Okay. He was in Vietnam?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*Yes sir. Where were your wife and son? Did they stay in San Diego or were they back in Texas?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No, they . . . She's a farm girl, neighboring farm of my parents, and she went home, and she had our first child. She went to Hamilton County and stayed, and she was very, very good about letting both set of parents have the joy of watching the first son grow up. She would go back and forth.

*That's great. How did she handle you being in the Army during the war? Was she worried about you?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Why, yeah. You know, there was letters goin' back and forth all the time. And if I had the chance and the jingles, I'd call her and talk to her, and listen to my first son try to mumble a little something to Daddy.

*That's great. I was going to ask you, sir, when the war ended and you were in Italy, did you leave the mules there or did you bring them back?*

**Norman Witzsche:** You know what? The Yugoslav government got them mules, and they must have had some real good feasts on that mule steak.

*Yeah. So you guys didn't bring them back. You turned them over.*

**Norman Witzsche:** No sir, they were given to the Yugoslav government.

*Yeah, interesting.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That's the word I got. I'm not, I didn't have the privilege to know for sure but we got rid of 'em.

*You're probably right.*

**Norman Witzsche:** We got rid of 'em real quickly.

*Do you remember how long it took for you to get back to the United States after the war was over?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, it was about two months after it was declared over. Well, it was before that. We were loading a ship to, we's gonna be included in the invasion of Japan, and we loaded the ship and before they got on, they give the mules to the Yugoslav government, and we were already en route over there to make up the convoy to be part of it to invade Japan. So when we got the Straits of Gibraltar, we just felt very sure we was gonna declare, you know, disband, and go home. No sir, we went on to New York Harbor, and just before we saw the most beautiful sight in my memory from the war was when we come in sight of the Statue of Liberty. I thought that was . . . I'm quite a history bug, and I had, you know, read about it. We come right around the Straits of Gibraltar and saw the Statue of Liberty, and that sight stayed in my mind forever.

*That's great.*

**Norman Witzsche:** What it stands for is so important.

*Yes sir. At that point, did your wife and family, did they know you were coming home?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes. Yeah, I wasn't gonna tell 'em. You know, these guys would come back, when we got to New York Harbor and, "Man, I talked to my folks, my dad, my sister, my brother, my wife." Oh, what a wonderful time it was, and ol' Norman just couldn't stay hooked, and I called Irena, that was my wife.

*And so you told them that you were in New York and then, did you know at that point how much longer it would be before you got back to Texas?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I said, "We're coming home." It's a delay loading on the troop train and we'll go to San Antone. From there we'll disperse 'cause we was made up of Texas boys.

*Okay. Do you remember, can you describe, sir, for us, what it was like the day you finally did get back home?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh, it was so great. My wife come over to Fredericksburg. I caught a bus from San Antone up to Fredericksburg. She came over to Fredericksburg and picked me up. It was about midnight when she got there, and she had my son with her, and what a wonderful day that was.

*Yes sir, I imagine. How old was your son?*

**Norman Witzsche:** He right now . . .

*How old was he at the time?*

**Norman Witzsche:** He was about two.

*Two years old. That's great.*

**Norman Witzsche:** He knew Daddy though.

*Yeah, wow.*

**Norman Witzsche:** I know my wife did a good job on that.

*Yes sir. That's great. Does he remember that?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Did he remember it?

*No, does he today remember that, you coming home?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yeah. You know, I'm sorry. I did not ask him. I'll try to have that information for you when we meet again.

*Oh, I was just curious. I know some people say they don't remember anything when they're two years old and there's other folks that do remember things at that age, and I would think that would be certainly a day that was exciting for him.*

**Norman Witzsche:** I doubt if Wayne remembers it.

*That's really great. I imagine that was a neat homecoming, to come back and be reunited like that. So at that point were you discharged from the Army? Were you out of the service?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, we got a delay in route and got it extended 'cause there was a lot of uncertainty 'cause we got turned loose immediately when Japan folded. And that was all, you know, verbal. There wasn't nothing very solid but we got an extension, I think, twice to stay on our delay in route at home. That was a wonderful vacation for us.

*That's great. And so at that point, you had no desire to stay in the Army, right? You were ready to return back to your normal life?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Do that one again please sir.

*At that point were you ready to get back to your regular life, ready to get out of the Army?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh, yes. Yeah. It was, you have the longing, if you're not a regular Army man, you have that longing to get back home and start your own life.

*That's right. So what is it that you did? Did you go back to work on the farm?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir, I did. I wound up in the sales field for about 10 years, I guess. I'm just guessing now. But I really enjoyed it 'cause right at that time was an ideal time to be a salesman for almost anything. You'd go out and call on people 'cause they didn't have the chance to get a lot of things that they could get later on.

*Sure. I know there was quite a bit of a boom after the war ended in terms of the economy and building.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir, there sure was.

*Did you stay in Texas?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir, I did. I stayed in the Central Texas area, basically Fort Worth, Dallas, Houston, and that's basically where I operated most of my years after the war was over with.

*I know, sir, you said you stayed in good touch with those that you served with, and you went to a lot of reunions. Tell us a little bit about the reunions.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Me and a kid that was my grade, first grade in school, Bill Ray, he's a writer. And I have an idea that he could fill you in on a lot of things of what we have been passed over. Billy Ray and I got together and we lived a distance, now it's not very far but it was for us then, about 60 miles. You know, gas and all the things that was short, was hard to come by, but a lot of people helped us out and we had enough stuff to get together. We met, Billy Ray and I met in Dallas, Texas, and we decided we needed to have a reunion for our grades. We was one of the biggest classes this little school had, and we were in senior years, most of us, when this happened, and so we decided we've have a reunion. And our coach was Prof Love, an old bachelor, which was a wonderful, wonderful handler of young men and boys. He was a good one. We decided we meet a weekend in Camp Whitney, Fort Whitney, on Lake Whitney and we met there, I believe, for 32 years before we finally disbanded.

*Now was this for your high school or for your military unit?*

**Norman Witzsche:** High school, we called it Pottsville reunion.

*Okay. So you didn't have, there weren't any reunions then for your old Army unit.*

**Norman Witzsche:** I tell you, Billy Ray is a writer, and he lives in Dallas, and if you'll call him, he can fill in a lot of these blanks better than I can.

*Yes sir. We'd love to interview him too if he's interested.*

**Norman Witzsche:** We met every year for 32 years. We got down to about three men. They either moved out so far away or they passed on. We wasn't having but about three or four of us

getting together, and we was one of the biggest classes that that little school, country school, had. And we got together and we called it the Pottsville reunion.

*Why did you call it Pottsville?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Pottsville is the school and the little town we all come from.

*Okay, in Hamilton County?*

**Norman Witzsche:** It's in Hamilton County, yes sir.

*How many kids were in your class?*

**Norman Witzsche:** In our class I think there was somewhere in the neighborhood of 20, 19 or 20.

*And that was a big class for your school.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Billy Ray can give you that information right down to the T. He was a writer for a Fort Worth paper for many years.

*Yes sir. And what brought you to the Austin area?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, that's where I wound up through changing jobs a couple times.

*How long have you been in Austin?*

**Norman Witzsche:** I've been here, I'm just having to guess, something like about 35 years.

*So you saw Austin change a lot then? You saw it grow a lot.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh, yes sir, I have. It's remarkable how the population has grown, and the city has grown. The politics have really expanded it. You know, politics is much more than it used to be.

*Sure, just the size of government alone.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That's right.

*That's true. And I know you said you had a son. Did you have any other children?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes, he has two girls, and they're very good little girls, productive. I have no great grandchildren.

*So you had one son?*

**Norman Witzsche:** One son and one daughter. My daughter has a boy. My grandson, great grandson, Jeff.

*That's great. You think he's going to go into the military like you did?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No, I don't think so. His daddy is a very bright young man and his son's taking after his daddy I think.

*Well, that's good. Well, sir, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today. You know these interviews are for history and for posterity. We're recording these so that future generations can hear these interviews and learn from them.*

**Norman Witzsche:** I'd like to get any information that you have on it. I have a little VCR disk I believe it's called, and I have that information on a disk. If you'd like it, I'll send it to you.

*Okay sir. What I'll do first is in about a week or so, I'm going to send you copies of this interview on CDs that you can give to your family and friends. And we're also going to send you a nice commemorative binder with a signed letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. It's just a small way of us saying thank you for your service.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, I'd like to mention I am so proud of the VA and the different programs it stands for, I'd like for you to get one.

*Yes sir.*

**Norman Witzsche:** They have been my inspiration. My dad was a veteran, and I remember when I was just a little boy, they've have a little parade on Armistice Day or some celebration day, and Hamilton would march around the square. My daddy was the oldest son with his father died when he was just a boy, and my dad was taking the reins and kept things going at home with his mother. His mother was the outgoingest little person I ever met. She was a fireball.

*Were they in Hamilton County too, sir?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir. And she loved to dance. If somebody didn't ask her to dance, she'd go ask somebody to dance with her. She was a great gal. My daddy's father, grandpa of my dad's family, his family brought him over, I believe he was four months old. Then on my mother's side, her dad was a German immigrant, and his name was Kopp. And he was a good farmer. He had one of the best farms in Hamilton County when I become a young man. I said, "Man, if I decide I want to stay on a farm, I'm gonna go down there." It was where the Cowhouse intersected with the Bosque Creek, I believe it is. But I decided I'd take a different route in life.

*Did your dad tell you many stories about his time in World War I?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes. He was in the Army with a former president, Truman.

*Oh he was, okay. Was he in artillery?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Yes sir.

*He was, wow.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Daddy would tell about how they would carry them artillery shells, and he was just a little guy, and he muscled them things on his shoulder, whatever it would take to get carry them shells, and he said the big guys, they'd wind up having to sit down and take a rest. And he always assured me that if I kept myself in good physical condition, that I could pass a lot of tests that are not taken by someone else, if you're testing yourself.

*Did he tell you much about Truman? Did he see Truman much there?*

**Norman Witzsche:** No. He didn't. He didn't boast about it. He didn't tell me much about it 'cause he knew I would spread it. At that time Truman was a much-liked man. You know, he was president and somebody would come out of the senate or somewhere, you know, and tell him, you know, my home needs a new courthouse or whatever it is. You know what Harry S. Truman would do? In the evening he'd shut down early his office, and he'd go down and drive down his own car down there and look at that situation. That meant that they would get it or they wouldn't get it.

*Did your father join the American Legion when he got back?*

**Norman Witzsche:** Oh yes, he did. He was a very good member of the American Legion. If he were living right now, I know his membership will still be active.

*That's great. Well, I belong to American Legion post myself. I'm actually the Commander of my post, and I know that the Legion was started after World War I, and so I thought your father might have been a member. That's great.*

**Norman Witzsche:** My daddy was a musician, you know, in his extra spare time, he'd play for dances and call square dances and stuff like that around in the community. He didn't do it professionally. He did it in the community.

*Was his Legion post located there in Pottsville?*

**Norman Witzsche:** In Hamilton.

*In Hamilton, okay. That's great. Well, sir, again I want to thank you for letting us interview you. This is just a small way that the State of Texas can say thank you to you for your service. It means a lot.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Listen, I'm very humbled and appreciate the opportunity because I feel like I'm representing not only my family, my grandfathers, and the uncles and aunts, but also the community.

*Absolutely. I'm sure they were proud of your service then just as we're proud of your service today.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Well, I have gotten lots of cards at different times, and it just makes you feel, it just humbles you so much to know there's enough people out there that really love our nation and are willing to apply effort.

*That's right, that's right, absolutely. Well, sir, we appreciate everything you've done, and again, just thank you, and be looking in a week or two for that package to arrive from us with those CDs and that letter and certificate. And I'll be sure to include that story by Ernie Pyle in there too about the pack mules.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Okay. People that don't know it, them mules can walk on . . . If a mule ahead of 'em, I don't care how small the ledge is, around these mountain points, if the mule ahead of 'em went on it, all the rest of 'em would trail right in behind 'em.

*I believe it, yes sir.*

**Norman Witzsche:** They were good.

*Yes sir. Absolutely. Well, sir, again, thank you very much and Ms. Thompson knows how to get a hold of me too. So if you ever need anything, just let her know and she can call me.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Okay. Remember Billy Ray lives up in the Dallas area.

*Yes sir.*

**Norman Witzsche:** And he can fill you in on a lot of stuff that I have omitted or that I don't know. But I want to thank you, and humbly grateful for doing anything you can to represent what we stood for during that war.

*Yes sir, absolutely. That's what this program is about.*

**Norman Witzsche:** And I tell everybody. I can't tell you why we win all the wars or have so far, because sometimes it looks like they're not trying or they haven't got the backbone, but we get there in the end.

*That's right. I agree, sir. Sir, again, thank you very much and we'll be in touch again soon.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Thank you, sir, and I'm talking to you where at?

*I'm here in Austin. I'm at the Stephen F. Austin Building.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Okay. I live in, right now I'm in a healthcare place. My wife and I have both been in this place for a number of months. We're a little bit wobbly. We have this thing of falling, and a number of other things.

*I understand. Well, they seem like nice people there, Ms. Thompson and Mr. Merrick. They all seem like good folks.*

**Norman Witzsche:** That lady is just wonderful. She came and zeroed me in, told me that if I couldn't hear, let her know, she'd get me more volume. But you're coming in very good to me, and if you're down here, you got an invitation to come see me.

*Absolutely. I'll have to do that sometime sir.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Okay. When you talk to Bill Ray, just tell him hello for me, and he can fill you in on all the other boys that was in that class.

*All right sir, sounds good. Okay, sir, you take care. You have a good weekend, okay?*

**Norman Witzsche:** You too. Thanks again. We love you and we love our country.

*Yes sir. Take care. Goodbye.*

**Norman Witzsche:** Bye bye.