Radus Kemperman Oral History Interview: Polar Bear Oral History Project

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Polar Bear Oral History Project

Mr. Radus H. Kemperman


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The Hope College Polar Bear Oral History Project was conducted from summer 1977 through fall 1979. Three undergraduate History majors, Ms. Nancy Johnson, Ms. Deborah Lenning, and Mr. Glen Johnson, researched the American Intervention in the Russian civil war, located the survivors, and did the interviews. They also typed the rough drafts and attended to the many administrative details related to getting the manuscripts into final form. The latter task was cheerfully completed by departmental secretaries Myra Jordan and Carole Boeve and their assistants. The students worked under the general supervision of G.L. Penrose of the Department of History. Ultimately, the project depended upon the diligence of the students and upon the willing responses of the veterans.

Department of History
Hope College
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Mr. Radus H. Kemperman
Offensive Against Kodish and Emtsa, December 29-31, 1918
BATTLE OF BOLSHIE OZERKI, MARCH 31–APRIL 4, 1919
PREFACE

Interviewee: Mr. Radus H. Kemperman

Interview: June 23, 1977
Muskegon, Michigan

Interviewers: Miss Nancy Johnson
Miss Deborah Lenning
Radus Henry Kemperman was born in Wooster, Michigan, on the 11th of July, 1890. His parents, Henry and Grace Kemperman, were from the Netherlands. Henry Kemperman was a farmer and lumberman. Radus attended Public School in Wooster, then worked as a machinist until he was drafted into the U. S. Army on June 23, 1918. Mr. Kemperman served as a private in Company "E" of the 339th Infantry Regiment. He underwent basic training at Camp Custer near Battle Creek, Michigan. After three weeks of training at Camp Custer, his regiment was transferred to Camp Mills, New York. On July 22 his company sailed to England on the Northumberland for further training, and on August 26 they set sail for North Russia on the M. M. T. Nagoya. They arrived at Archangel, Russian, on September 5, 1918.

Mr. Kemperman was on guard duty in Archangel during his first two months in Russia. Then, on November 11, he was sent to the front lines in the Seletskoe Seetor. "E" Company participated in the Battle of Kodish in December-January. They went to Archangel in January for a month's rest before proceeding to the railroad front. Company "E" remained on the railroad front from March 3 until March 24, and later that month participated in the offensive battle at Bolshie Ozerki. Shortly after that Mr. Kemperman returned with his company to Archangel to again stand guard duty. On June 2, 1919, he boarded the steamer M. M. T. Czar with companies A, G, I, L, and M. After arriving in Brest, France, on June 11, they
remained at Camp Pontaezen until June 21. They then sailed to the U. S., arriving in New Jersey on June 20, 1919. One week later Mr. Kemperman received his discharge.

Following his discharge Mr. Kemperman attended night school classes and then found employment as a machinist with the Austin Machine Company. On June 10, 1920, he married Anna Mary Burns of Grant, Michigan. They settled in Muskegon, Michigan, and had three children: Jeanette, born [date removed], 1921; Dolores, born [date removed], 1925; and Richard, born [date removed], 1926.

Mr. Kemperman is a member of the Captain Howard H. Pellegrom post of the V. F. W. in Muskegon, Michigan, where he now resides with his wife. Since his retirement in 1960, Mr. Kemperman likes to spend his time fishing, working on his large garden, or enjoying his ten grandchildren. The Kempermans have a cottage on Crystal Lake near Fremont, Michigan, where they spend much of their time.
JOHNSON: First of all, were you drafted or did you enlist for World War I?

KEMPERMAN: Drafted.

JOHNSON: How did you feel about that?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I didn't like it. (laughs) I don't think very many of them did want to go. But I knew I had to go, so there was no use in trying to get out of it. I didn't try to get out of it at all, I just simply--when the time come, I quit my job and left.

JOHNSON: How long did you train at Camp Custer?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know.

MRS. KEMPERMAN: Three weeks.

KEMPERMAN: Not very long. Less than a few weeks of it. Then we went to Battle Creek. Yes, Battle Creek's where we was.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about your training experience there?

KEMPERMAN: Oh, I don't know. Not so much. Then from there we must have went across then--went to New York, went across to England [for] training a little while. Then we piled in the boat and went to Russia.

LENNING: Were you quarantined when you were in training?
KEMPERMAN: Yes.

LENNING: What was that all about?

KEMPERMAN: Well, see, we had a flu epidemic there, too, when we got on our trip.

JOHNSON: Was that at Camp Custer?

KEMPERMAN: That was after we left England. A lot of them we had to carry off the boat. Then we was in Russia for a while on guard duty. And on Armistice Day, we went to the front line for our first time. (laughter) And after this we all drank beer. We sure liked that.

JOHNSON: What did you think your orders would be after you finished training at Camp Custer? Where did you think you would be going?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we didn't know, I guess.

JOHNSON: Did you think you would be going to France?

KEMPERMAN: Well, no. We new we was not going to go over to France, but we went as far as England. They picked out our company to go to Russia for some reason. I don't know why. See, I guess they thought—I know five or six companies went to Russia. I don't know for sure about that, though.

JOHNSON: While you were in Camp Custer, where did you think you would be going?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. I don't know for sure. We probably
didn't know. They don't tell you everything, you know.

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about the voyage across the Atlantic to England on the Northumberland?

KEMPERMAN: No, I guess not.

JOHNSON: When you left New Jersey to go to England on the British boat?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we went to England from New York. There we was in the camp for a while.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about your experiences in England?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. We didn't like any of it, to tell you the truth about it. (laughs)

JOHNSON: Did you continue training there?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you feel as though you were being adequately trained in Camp Custer, or was it all rushed?

KEMPERMAN: Well, mostly I don't think we knew what we was going to do. You know, it's funny they don't explain it to anyone. Just pile on the boat, and part of the time you don't know where you're going.

JOHNSON: When did you first realize that you would be going to Russia?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. I guess when we left England. We
knew we were going to Russia then.

JOHNSON: You knew when you left England, or did you find out on the voyage?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know for sure about that. I wouldn't say.

JOHNSON: What did you know about Russia at that time?

KEMPERMAN: What did we know about it? (laughs) Not very much, I guess. I guess we didn't know where we was going, or what it was, or anything. Just a God-forsaken country. (laughter) That's all I can say for it.

JOHNSON: Did you know anything about Bolshevism at that time?

KEMPERMAN: No. You see, we was sent over there to guard ammunition and guns, as far as we know. And before we got there, the Bolshevik army--the revolution broke out in Russia. And they had most of our guns and ammunition, using it on us.

JOHNSON: Did anyone give you any lectures or information to prepare you for what you'd encounter in Russia?

KEMPERMAN: No, I guess not. Not that I know of.

JOHNSON: So you just went over there "cold", so to speak?

KEMPERMAN: I know that we went on the train--got on the train there at Bakaritsa--and rode all night on the train. And then we got off the train, and next morning we started out on a four-day hike. Four days to where we wanted to go--five days, really, to tell the truth about it. We hiked four days right straight.
Mud, and snow, swamps, and everything else. That was when we was going to the front line.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what ship you sailed to Russia on?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Was it the Nagoya?

KEMPERMAN: No. Lots of names that I don't remember. You know it's . . .

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about the Spanish flu epidemic on that boat?

KEMPERMAN: Well, not too much. I know I was sick, for one.

JOHNSON: Did a doctor come and treat you?

KEMPERMAN: (laughs) Give you a couple pills, is all. I got off the boat. They didn't carry me; I walked off the boat. But I laid in the bunk there for about three or four days.

JOHNSON: Did anybody attend to you during that time?

KEMPERMAN: Well, some brought me something to eat once in a while.

JOHNSON: So, what would you say about the quality of the medical care?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. I don't really know too much about that.
JOHNSON: Did you feel that you were well-looked after?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did they have enough medicine?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know just what they had. I don't know.

LENNING: When you got to Archangel, what would you say was the initial reaction of the residents to the American soldiers' arrival?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. Really, I don't know.

LENNING: Right after you landed, the First and Third Battalions left directly for the front. What did you think they were going off to do? (pause) Do you remember that?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: What were your first impressions of the city? (pause) Do you remember anything about Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: What do you remember about the people?

KEMPERMAN: Well, they was all right, I guess. You know, it was pretty hard living conditions for them. A lot of them didn't get what they had to have, I don't suppose. And living conditions was pretty bad, we know that. So was ours. (laughter)

LENNING: What were your first duties while you were in Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: 'Course, we was on guard duty then for a while before
we went to the front lines.

LENNING: What were you guarding?

KEMPERMAN: Well, some public places, you know, so on, and a lot of them guarding guns, and ammunition, and all that stuff--and supplies.

LENNING: What kind of job was that? Did anything ever happen?

KEMPERMAN: It was kind of a lonesome job anyway. (laughs)

LENNING: Did you ever see any Bolshevik prisoners in the city of Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: Yes. I and another guy took two Bolshevik prisoners from our headquarters to Bolshie Ozerki, or someplace like that. I and two guys took two prisoners.

LENNING: Could you tell me about that?

KEMPERMAN: Why, that's about all there was to it. (laughs)

LENNING: Did you know why you were taking them?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

LENNING: What was it like?

KEMPERMAN: We walked the whole distance of eighteen miles to take the prisoners. I don't know what was with me at that time. We took the prisoners down there and turned them over to the--supposed to take them over to the English, and they was supposed to take these prisoners. When we got there with them, why, they
wouldn't take them. They wanted to take them over to the Americans. We found out afterwards that the English was supposed to take care of them prisoners.

LENNING: How did you think the British treated the prisoners?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. Couldn't tell you.

LENNING: How did you treat them? (laughs)

KEMPERMAN: Well, you know what that means. You ain't supposed to let them get away from you.

LENNING: Did you arrest or capture those prisoners yourself, or were they just turned over to you? (pause) Do you remember?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: Did you know anything about the political situation in the city of Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: No, not too much. No.

LENNING: Who seemed to be in control of the government there?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

LENNING: Did the Russians seem like they were governing themselves?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess so, yes. I suppose so.

LENNING: To what extent would you say that the British had
extended their influence?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

LENNING: Do you remember anything about the flu epidemic in the city after you arrived?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did the Archangel residents treat the Americans different from the other Allies like the British or the French?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess we was the only ones there.

JOHNSON: Weren't there British there?

KEMPERMAN: Oh yes. British, yes. We took their place when we went to Russia. We went to the front lines where they was.

JOHNSON: Did the Russian citizens in Archangel show any hostilities toward any of the Allies or the Americans?

KEMPERMAN: Well, no, I guess not. Not really, I don't think.

JOHNSON: Do you remember who commanded your company?

KEMPERMAN: No, I don't.

JOHNSON: Do you remember Major Young at all?

KEMPERMAN: John J. Baker was our first lieutenant. He had charge of the company most all the time.

JOHNSON: How about Major Young?
KEMPERMAN: Young, let's see... I don't think so. I remember Major Donoghue, though.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about him?

KEMPERMAN: Well, the first battle we was into I was his runner—took messages into the front lines.

JOHNSON: Was he a pretty good commander?

KEMPERMAN: Well, he was all right, yes. I don't doubt but he was. I know one time he come back he had three or four bullet holes through the big coat he was wearing.

LENNING: Did the men seem to like him?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, I guess they did. They claimed he always had a canteen of rum on him. (laughter) But that's all I know about that.

JOHNSON: Do you remember Captain Heil?

KEMPERMAN: Captain Heil, well, he was trained—he went to school to learn to be a captain. And I guess he didn't turn out just right, you know, so Lt. Baker took his place.

JOHNSON: Was Baker an improvement over Captain Heil?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, he was a real nice man. He wouldn't send you where he wouldn't go himself.

JOHNSON: So he was alawys at the front lines with you when you had to go?
KEMPERMAN: Yes, yes. He was a real nice commander. 'Course, when he told you to do something, he wanted you to do it.
(laughter)

JOHNSON: Where did you go after you left Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: Come back to France.

JOHNSON: I mean, after you landed in Archangel. November 11, your first battle--where was that?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we was on guard duty when we first landed there.

JOHNSON: And after that?

KEMPERMAN: And after that we went to the front lines.

JOHNSON: Was that near Seletskoe?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about that?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Was that when you first encountered fighting with the Bolsheviks?

KEMPERMAN: Yes. That was at the Emsta River front where we had that battle--went to Kadish, as far as Kadish.

JOHNSON: How would the Bolsheviks fight at first? Did they seem like they were a well-organized army?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know.
LENNING: Were they a tough opponent?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess I don't know.

JOHNSON: Were their weapons and numbers superior to yours?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: They didn't outnumber you much?

KEMPERMAN: I guess not.

JOHNSON: Do you ever remember hearing any false news that the armistice had been signed?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: When and how did you discover that it had been signed?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we was on our way to the front lines the eleventh of November. When the armistice was being signed, we was on our way to the front line.

JOHNSON: How did you feel about that?

KEMPERMAN: Not very good. (laughs)

JOHNSON: Did you think you might be going home?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we didn't see why we had to go and the other one--except for when it's all over with. We were sent to guard supplies, you know.

JOHNSON: About when was it that you found out? Was it a lot later?
KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know for sure. Be pretty hard to keep track of the time there, you know, in the woods and all that stuff.

JOHNSON: But you didn't find out for a little while afterwards?

KEMPERMAN: No. We started for someplace in Russia and then the first battle--we didn't get there. Then one time they had our supply line cut so we couldn't get supplies in. They sent up a platoon of men, and I was in that, to find out where they cut the line. We found out where it was, went back and reported it, and they sent a whole platoon--sixty-some men--over there to attacke them. Drove them out. And then Baker, he just wanted to be sure and see what we'd done, you know, and he went back there with us again to see where we'd been. (laughter)

JOHNSON: What impact did the signing of the armistice have on the morale of the troops?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

JOHNSON: How did the men feel about fighting after that?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess they didn't like it any too well. It's just we couldn't see why we was there.

JOHNSON: Was any dissent ever voiced?

KEMPERMAN: No, I guess not.

JOHNSON: Were you adequately supplied?

KEMPERMAN: Well, our supplies were pretty bad at times. They
claimed our supplies come in four hundred miles with horses and reindeer. That's what they say.

JOHNSON: The supplies came in from four hundred miles away?

KEMPERMAN: That's what they say. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Would that have been from Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: No, Lapland. Someplace in Lapland, I think it was, yes.

JOHNSON: What was the quality of medical care at the front?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. Only once when I had the flu—that's the only time I was sick.

JOHNSON: If somebody were wounded, was there usually a doctor there to take care of him?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, they had a doctor, yes. I don't know how many; whether they had more than one or not I don't know.

JOHNSON: You don't know anything about medicine either?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Was your clothing adequate?

KEMPERMAN: Yes. (laughs) We had big goatskin coats. We had good clothes, that's for sure.

LENNING: Were they well-suited to the activities you had to perform?
KEMPERMAN: Yes. Yes, we had plenty of good—no, I wouldn't say plenty of good clothes, but we had, you know, enough to keep warm in.

JOHNSON: How common was frostbite?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did you ever get it?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: Did you know anyone else that ever had it?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: Would you say that there were adequate relief troops?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know, really. That's the amount of troops, you mean?

LENNING: Reserves, relief troops, so you wouldn't have to fight for too long, or replacements for when your ranks got thin.

KEMPERMAN: I don't know about that.

LENNING: Where were you housed on the front?

KEMPERMAN: Well, anywhere. You'd generally build a snowhouse with the pine branches. You know, make a house of pine branches and build a fire in there and sit around the fire. Had a lot of fun—try it someday! (laughter) Well, we used to go to work and fell a couple of trees together, you know, and take the pine branches and lay it over that and keep the snow off.
Then we'd build a fire in there and all huddle around the fire. Keep your feet warm.

LENNING: How were the living conditions in your barracks in Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: Well, it was all right.

LENNING: Did you sleep in barracks then?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, we were in quarters then.

LENNING: Did you have any problems with insects or vermin?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: Were your barracks well-heated and ventilated?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: When you were in the Seletskoe sector, near Kodish, did you ever sleep in a Russian peasant's home?

KEMPERMAN: Well, yes, I guess we did. I believe we did on the way.

LENNING: Do you remember how they received you?

KEMPERMAN: No, I guess not.

LENNING: Did you ever witness the forced evacuation of a village?

KEMPERMAN: No, I don't think so.

LENNING: Did you notice any difference between the peasants'
attitudes toward the Americans and their attitudes toward the other allies?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. I guess I don't think so. I don't know.

LENNING: Part of your company was at the battle of Kodish. Were you there?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

LENNING: Do you remember much about that?

KEMPERMAN: We went across the rivers in the morning, and we got to Kadish--I think about five miles, something like that--got to Kadish along after kard. That was when I was Major Donoghue's runner.

LENNING: Was this right after Christmas?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know exactly. It probably was, though I don't know for sure about the time.

LENNING: Were you there in January when the town was burned and you retreated?

KEMPERMAN: I must have been; I don't know though. I know we went into that town we call Kadish—all log buildings, and I can remember the windows was all broke out. And I and another guy, we was standing there in that window looking out to see where they was—where the Bolsheviki was—and that guy had his hand up against the window, and somebody shot him right
through the wrist.

LENNING: How was he taken care of?

KEMPERMAN: Well, they had a doctor there. They had one doctor, I know. They must of had somebody to take care of him.

LENNING: Do you remember anything else about Kadish?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we was in there for a few days, and the British took over, and the British had that for a day or so, and the Bolsheviki drove them out. Then Major Donoghue, he got a bunch of men and he drove the Bolsheviki out again.

JOHNSON: Were you with Major Donoghue then?

KEMPERMAN: I wasn't in with that bunch that drove them out for the second time. He just picked a bunch of men, machine-gunners, and went after them.

LENNING: How did the American troops feel towards the British contingent who had lost what the Americans had taken?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. They didn't like it very well, I guess.

LENNING: Where did you go after Kodish?

KEMPERMAN: We went back to Archangel again. It was long after Christmas sometime.

LENNING: How long did you get to rest in Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know for sure.
JOHNSON: Was it just a couple of weeks or so?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, I suppose. And, see, after that, we went to another front again.

LENNING: Was it the railroad front? (pause) Did you ride there in trains instead of walking?

KEMPERMAN: I think so.

LENNING: Do you remember much about the railroad front?

KEMPERMAN: No, not too much. Only that they had big piles of wood in there. They would burn wood in their locomotives at that time, and we used part of the wood for building us some shacks to keep out the cold—just piled up wood and then covered them up with snow. That's the way we lived in there.

LENNING: Do you remember being under the command of Major J. Brooks Nichols then?

KEMPERMAN: I guess not.

LENNING: How did the living conditions at the railroad front compare with those at Kadish?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

LENNING: After the railroad front, were you at Bolshie Ozerki?

KEMPERMAN: Well, let's see. No, I don't know just how that worked now. Anyway, we was on the railroad front...

LENNING: From January to March?
KEMPERMAN: Yes. And then, whether we went back to Archangel then or not I don't remember. We went in there.... I don't remember just how all that was.

LENNING: This calendar on "E" Company says that after the railroad front from March 3 until March 24, it went to Archangel, and then it participated in the offensive battle of Bolshie Ozerki on the Obozerskaya-Onega Road towards the end of March.

KEMPERMAN: I guess probably it was.

LENNING: Do you remember that battle?

KEMPERMAN: Well, eventually we was supposed to drive them out of there. Then we had this American infantry and Russian infantry, and as soon as they drewed fire, the Russian quit. And then Baker said, "If they ain't going to fight for their own country, I ain't going to fight for them." Everybody went to the rear, and they got a bunch of big guns in there-­artillery. They had about eighteen, twenty gunmen, and they went in and blowed up the city where the Bolshevikis was. Then we went in there after the Bolshevikis pulled out. And they left a lot of ammunition that they couldn't take with them. We piled that ammunition up in big piles and touched it off with--blowed it, destroyed it.

LENNING: Do you know why it was destroyed instead of cap­tured?

KEMPERMAN: Well, they was afraid they was going to come back,
I suppose. Then they'd have the ammunition ready to use on use, I guess. So we had to destroy that ammunition. Talk about an explosion, that was it! The biggest explosion I ever seen. (laughs) And then we went back; I guess about that time we started back for Archangel and all.

JOHNSON: Was your food adequate?

KEMPERMAN: Well, nothing to brag of, I guess. I guess they kept 'em alive. (laughter)

LENNING: That's about it then?

KEMPERMAN: I guess that's about it.

JOHNSON: Did you know of any cases of malnutrition or food poisoning?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did the food keep the men fairly healthy then?

KEMPERMAN: I know if we had anything left, they was always glad to get a hold of it to eat it, you know. Anything left over, most of the time it ended up for ourself.

JOHNSON: How often did you have an opportunity for bathing or changing clothes at the front?

KEMPERMAN: Well, not very often.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about the sanitary conditions at Archangel?
KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't just know what you mean.

JOHNSON: Did they have modern plumbing?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, they had that. They had places where you could take a bath or showers--a hot steam, something of that sort.

JOHNSON: Did you have any contact with any of the other battlefronts?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did you have any idea at all about what the other companies were doing?

KEMPERMAN: No. There was, I don't know, must've been about four or five companies in there. But what they were doing, I don't know. I guess some of them got pretty badly beaten when they first got there.

JOHNSON: Did you ever get any news of that while you were there?

KEMPERMAN: That was while we was in Archangel, when we was in our company doing guard duty. And some companies went right to the front line off the boat, and I guess they got pretty bad beaten--some of them did, anyway.

JOHNSON: Did that news reach you before you went to the front?

KEMPERMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: How did that affect the morale of your company?
KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Apparently the White Russians and the British let you down quite often in battle situations, is that right?

KEMPERMAN: Yes. Well, the White Russians, I don't know--I guess they was all right. But you know, whether they had a big enough army or not, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did you feel that you could rely on them in a battle situation? Could you trust them to hold their positions?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, I guess so.

JOHNSON: How about at Bolshie Ozerki where they wouldn't even fight for their own country?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess--I don't know. A lot of them, I guess, wouldn't fight for their own country. I don't know.

JOHNSON: How did you feel about fighting for them, then?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we didn't feel too good. Why should we go fight for their country? That's the way we felt about it.

JOHNSON: Did you feel that the British were bearing their brunt of the war burden?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know.

JOHNSON: Were they at the front lines often?

KEMPERMAN: Yes, I guess so.
JOHNSON: Did you ever fight with any British?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did you ever fight with any French?

KEMPERMAN: Well, we had French aviators, about all that I know of. And then the French would go with a load back over the front, looping the loop over the treetops. (laughter) I can remember that.

JOHNSON: Did you ever encounter any Bolshevik propaganda?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Do you remember when Company "E" was stationed at Kadish, and George Albers, who was a prisoner of war from Muskegon...

KEMPERMAN: Yes, we heard about it.

JOHNSON: You weren't there at the time when he came out on the bridge?

KEMPERMAN: No, he was in one of the companies, and they captured him, wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes.

KEMPERMAN: Yes, that's all I know about it.

JOHNSON: You didn't see him at all after he was captured?

KEMPERMAN: No. No, I didn't see him. I don't know the man
at all. But anyway, he was captured, and we heard about it
different times: that the first prisoner they got, and they
marched him up and down the street, you know, to show people
what they did.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk to him after he came back to
Muskegon?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: What were you told would happen to Americans or Allies
taken as Bolshevik prisoners?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. I don't know what they did with them.
Couldn't tell you.

LENNING: Were you ever present when the Bolsheviks would send
their orators out on the bridge?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did you ever witness any atrocities by either the
Bolsheviks or the Allies?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did you ever receive any letters from home mention-
ing news reports of the expedition?

KEMPERMAN: I don't think so.

JOHNSON: Was your mail ever censored?

KEMPERMAN: I guess it was. They say it was; I don't know.
LENNING: [to Mrs. Kemperman]: Did you ever get letters from him?

MRS. KEMPERMAN: Once in a while I would.

LENNING: Did they ever cross anything out that he wrote?

MRS. KEMPERMAN: I think they were censored, too.

KEMPERMAN: They claimed they was.

LENNING: It would have been stamped on the envelope.

MRS. KEMPERMAN: Yes, yes.

JOHNSON [to Mr. Kemperman]: What about the letters that you received? Were they censored also?

KEMPERMAN: I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did you ever see a copy of the American Sentinel while you were in Archangel?

KEMPERMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have any dealings with the Red Cross?

KEMPERMAN: Well, not too much, I guess. They had cigarettes, you know, and stuff like that. That's just about all.

JOHNSON: What about the Y.M.C.A.?

KEMPERMAN: Well, they had a Y.M.C.A., yes, such as it was.

JOHNSON: Did you ever go there?
KEMPERMAN: Yes. Didn't get to see much of that, though.

JOHNSON: Did you have any dealings with the Salvation Army?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess they was all right.

LENNING: Were they there at the front lines?

KEMPERMAN: I don't think--I don't know whether the Salvation Army was in there or not. Now, I wouldn't say. I don't know.

LENNING: How much did you know about the purpose of the expedition when you were over there?

KEMPERMAN: Well, the Americans had that ammunition and guns over there, and the Bolsheviks could capture our guns and ammunition, using our ammunition on us.

LENNING: Well, when you got there and the ammunition was gone, did you think that your purpose was to capture it back, or did you think that there was no longer a reason for you to be there?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. I don't know really.

LENNING: What did you think when you were sent out to fight the Bolsheviks? You said before that you didn't know anything about them.

KEMPERMAN: Well, I guess that's about it.

LENNING: Why did you think they were your enemy?

KEMPERMAN: I don't know. Couldn't tell you.
LENNING: Were you just told to fight them?

KEMPERMAN: Yes. See, we was sent to guard the supplies, I guess, and they got—they had it all, near as I know.

LENNING: Did the British direction of the expedition affect the morale of the troops?

KEMPERMAN: Well, they didn't see too much of the British, you know. They just once or twice seen them. That's about all.

LENNING: Did you know where your orders came from?

KEMPERMAN: No, I don't.

LENNING: But the British were in charge of the expedition?

KEMPERMAN: I suppose. I don't know.

LENNING: Looking back, what is your understanding about the purpose of the expedition?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know. Really, I don't.

LENNING: How did you feel about interfering in Russia's internal affairs?

KEMPERMAN: Probably not very good.

LENNING: Would you say that America's involvement was justified?

KEMPERMAN: No, I don't know that either.

LENNING: When did you first discover that the American troops
were evacuating?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know exactly. We come from the front line to Bakaritsa, I guess, and there's where we got ready to come back.

LENNING: Would that have been around the end of May? And you left real soon after that?

KEMPERMAN: Well, all right, I guess.

LENNING: How did you feel about leaving Russia without having resolved the conflict?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know just exactly. I don't know.

LENNING: What kind of reception did you get when you got home?

KEMPERMAN: When we left Russia, I know we had two icebreakers. They had to break the ice in the White Sea so we could get out of there. That was the third and fourth day of June. Yes, the third and fourth day of June. They had two icebreakers go ahead of us and break the ice in the White Sea to get out. Then we went to France. Then we got rid of all our heavy clothes. We had all our heavy clothes yet. We got rid of them and our guns, ready to get out of there.

LENNING: What kind of reaction did you get when you came home and told people where you had been? What did people say?

KEMPERMAN: (laughs) "What'd you do there?" That's about it.

LENNING: Then they hadn't been aware of what you had been
doing?

KEMPERMAN: No. Well, a lot of them didn't like the country, that's for sure.

LENNING: Did you find that most people had heard about it?

KEMPERMAN: Well, I don't know really. Lots of them, you know, they said our outfit was a "lost battalion", you know—got over there and they didn't know where they was for a while. I don't see why that should happen, though. But they claimed that the 339th was a lost battalion. But whether it was or not, I don't know.

LENNING: Would you say that your experience in North Russia affected you in any way?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: It didn't change you?

KEMPERMAN: No.

LENNING: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

KEMPERMAN: No, I guess that's about all.

JOHNSON: Thank you very much.