

Peter Davendonis
Veteran

Philip Leonard
Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Interviewer

Q: Please state your name.

PD: My name is Peter Davendonis.

Q: Where do you live?

PD: I live in Hoosick Falls, I used to live on 19 Wall Street before I joined the service. Then, we started off in the army. We got inducted in the 40's and we were shipped to Alabama to put in a full year of service.

Q: Fort McClellan wasn't it?

PD: Yes, working there. We had wooden guns, they didn't have working guns for us. We also had wooden machines. We had to walk 24 miles, it was that way until 1941. Tony Slaveus and I went down to the city to buy our suitcases to go home. Well, we heard the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor but we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. We were stuck in Alabama for another stinking year. So, you know what we did. All the 27th division was scattered all over Alabama to guard bridges and all that. The railroad put sliding cars on the side for headquarters. We had a stove and bunks in there. We had to guard all the bridges, we were there for four or five months. Then came the orders to go to Ford Ord so we got on two trains and went there. In Fort Ord, they gave us our guns and all the equipment we needed. We stayed at Ford Ord for six or seven months. Then, orders came to go down to the pier and get on the boat, Queen Mary. The Queen Mary was built with bunks in the bottom. When we get there, they put us in the hole and shipped us. I'm not sure how many days, maybe four or five. They wouldn't let us come up on deck. When we stopped, we were in Hawaii, good ole Hawaii. They put us on trunks and shipped us up to Pahoia. The rest went to Long Beach to serve, they were afraid the Japs might come landing there. Anyway; Fitzpatrick, Billy Ellis, a guy named Plyhole, and myself were taken out of headquarters and put in service quarters. We had to serve the boys along the beach; bread, ice meat, and vegetables. Every other day we had to go down the Hilo with two and a half ton trucks. We picked up all this stuff and went along the beach. Another outfit served the other side of the beach. Anyway, when we got down there, they had homemade ice boxes which we gave them. The last place we went was Black Sand Beach and boy, that was beautiful. It had about six little houses or shacks down there. We gave all the extra food to the people living there and they were so happy about it. We must have been on that island for six or seven months. Finally, they decided that the Japs weren't coming on the beaches. So, they took us off and shipped us to Pearl Harbor. On the other side, they built training camps but they didn't take us off

Service Company. We were still in service on the island over there. We stayed there until about 42 or 43, when Howland Smith got sick of us sitting around. He said his first marine division that was training all the time should be taken and put in reserve with our marines. So, down Pearl Harbor we went. We got on these big transporters and we sailed for at least three or four days, down in the hole where they wouldn't let us come up. When we stopped, they took us by companies and brought us on the deck to get our exercise. Holy Moly, you wouldn't believe this place! It was loaded with so many ships, we didn't know what was going on. For a couple of days, we stayed there, they let us go swimming and clean up. Then, they put us back in there and they started off. We didn't know where we were going. About three or four days later, they called us all together and told us we were in reserve for the first marine division on sight. We were sailing for quite a way and then when we stopped, and heard guns going off all the time. They still wouldn't let us up on deck. Suddenly, the marines went to shore first. The next day, they had us come up by our names and numbers, we went over to the side to head for the shore. Well, headquarters first battalion was us. When we got ashore, Sloven said, "Pete, you stay here. All the companies and everything that come off there, you direct them. Tell them go up this road here to the airport and we'll get situated. After we get situated, we'll send somebody back to get you." Well, I was waiting down there. Everybody went ashore that had to, and nobody was coming anymore. I thought, what the heck am I going to do? Should I have gone up that road because nobody was coming for me? I was all alone, if the Japs came out of the woods I'd be dead. So, I decided I'd stay down there and wait a little longer. It started getting dark, boy I was scared. I was young and scared as hell. There was nobody around me, except a few dead ones over there, who knows. There I was, I decided to dig a hole. On the sandy beach, they had a bank so I started digging with my shovel. I dug a good hole, so I sat in it and put my rifle on my legs and took my shelter in the sand there. It was getting darker and darker, jeepers I said so many prayers that night! Suddenly, those guns went off in the water. You could hear those big guns making noises straight over you. Then, the big flares would go off. I was scared, my gosh, I was scared. I sat there all-night long.

Q: Were you all by yourself?

PD: All by myself, nobody there. I could hear voices all around, the Japs. Good lord, help me. Then, morning came and oh was I happy. I was standing up, I had water up to my ass when the tide came. Holy mother, here came one of the guys, I don't remember which. He says, "Slows forgot you because you were busy. I said, "Yeah, good deal." So, I went back up there and we had to follow the marines until they wanted to get back and rest. Then, all our outfit, the 27, would have to fight. So, here I was and Slows said, "Pete, you have to go to Major Purcell and be his body guard." I said, "Oh, here we go again." So, I go and meet Major Purcell, two other guys, and the two drivers of the two and a half ton trucks. Anyway, Major Purcell draws down to the ammunition dump to get rid of the lousy rifles and get machine guns. Three of us got machine guns and we were supposed to bother him. Every two days, we had to pack up all his ammunition, food, and water and bring it up to our outfit. They were on a line because the marines were in reserve now. Our fellas were fighting. We brought up the food and everything

out there, they had an ammunition dump where we dropped it off. Then, we would go back and pick up more for the next day or the third day, I can't remember. We had to go up there so many times. That's what we had to do, pick up ammunition, walk up, and find out what ammunition they needed. He found out; then we would go out, load again, drop it off, and we would be alright. We did that until they had the Banzai Charge. We couldn't get there that morning. Something happened that we didn't bring all their ammunition up, that's why they were running out. The Banzai Charge came, we were stuck back. After they scattered all over, we helped them to mop up. After that, a lot of our fellas got killed. They kept us there and let the marines go. We had to guard the prisoners and bring them out in the fields with their wives for fishing and getting rice patties. After that, they took us and shipped us to Spiritus Sanctus, to pick up more people. Our outfit was all shot up, we needed more people.

Q: In my research, I found out John Corelli, Bill Fox, and Ronald Johnson were wounded.

PD: Also, Bon Har and Butkus were killed.

Q: Zelinsky, Herman Barnhart, and James McGarven were killed. McGarven was killed on July 10th or 11th, around that time, I researched. Were you at that battle? You were down below because you hadn't come up with your ammunition yet, right?

PD: Yes, we did bring ammunition up every time our men got on the line. We didn't bring it for the marines because they had their own.

Q: Some of these fellas got wounded in that attack, right?

PD: Yes, after that they shipped us to Spiritus Sanctus, an island that belonged to the British. When they got more people, they trained us again. We threw grenades, went on the rifle range, and all that. They shipped me out to Kate Company. The other fellas like Johnny Young, John Corelli, and the rest went to another outfit. They didn't stay with their outfit.

Q: You all were split up?

PD: Yes.

Q: Company K was an infantry outfit, right?

PD: Yes, Slows promoted the captain and got a company. He wasn't with us either because he had a company of his own. Then, we got on the boats again and we started to sail to Okinawa. The marines went ashore, they were hardly shooting at all and then we came ashore. When we got there, there was nothing going on until we got way into the center of the island. Boy oh boy, that's when all the trouble began. The marines were fighting like hell, and then we were fighting like hell. It goes on and on, I don't know how long we were there. On and off, we took turns fighting the Japs. Finally, they all got on one side of the island. People were jumping off the cliffs and killing themselves.

Q: The Japanese?

PD: Yes, even the civilians. Somebody must have told them we were bad or something so they jumped off, and threw their kids off, it was terrible. After that, the island was

secured, it was taken over by us and the marines. We sat around for quite a while on that island and they told us we were going to go to Japan. Holy man, oh mother! If we had gone to Japan, I wouldn't be here today. While we were there, we heard a bomb was dropped. Then, we heard another bomb was dropped. Boy, were we happy when they said the war was over. Then, they left us on that island, using a point system. If you had enough points, you would be the first one to go home. I must have been there about four months before I went home. We went back to California and got on troop trains to Fort Dix, where they gave us armed service time and everything. They asked us, "Would you like to join and get double time?" Most of the guys said, "You can stick it." We went home and boy, were we happy.

Q: You spent five years in the service, you got back in 45, right?

PD: Yes, five years, boy. When I got back, I got my job and went right to work. Then, in 45 I married my wife. I met her down in Troy. We got married and had two children, they're alive now, thank god.

Q: Where do your children live?

PD: Bernie lives in Hoosick Falls up near the health center. My daughter is in Grand Junction, she runs the x-ray technician for the army.

Q: Is she in the service?

PD: No, she's the head of the whole thing there. She has three children of her own and my son has one. I think that's about all I can say.

Q: Thank you Pete for telling a fine story.

PD: But, I didn't tell you about the snakes. When I was in K Company, we were up in the front there and these houses were built out of clay. Five of us went in there, I didn't know these guys. They said, "Pete, you stay outside and guard for three hours and then we will change roles." I'm sitting there with my gun, it was a beautiful night with a full moon. I look down and holy mother, there's a big snake right by my foot! They told us, if you get bit you just die. I froze, I didn't know if I should jump up or shoot, I was scared. He went and disappeared and I yelled, "Hey fellas, there's a big snake, come out." They all came out and slept on the ground instead of inside. I'm not lying, it was a big snake. If you get bit, you can't do anything.