

**Gerald West  
Veteran**

**Laura Heal  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on December 20, 2005 at 3:45pm  
Hudson Falls High School  
Hudson Falls, NY**

**Q:** When and where were you born?

**GW:** I lived in Port Ambrose and actually was born in Glens Falls hospital.

**Q:** What was your date of birth?

**GW:** October 29th, 1919 which in those days, that was strange because most people were born right in the homes but they had a problem so I had to be born in the hospital which was very rare for those days.

**Q:** What type of education did you have before you entered the war?

**GW:** Just high school.

**Q:** Where were you when you heard of the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7th, 1941?

**GW:** I'll never forget it, I was sitting in a barracks in Quantico, Virginia. I had duty that weekend. There was about ten of us there listening to the Boston Redskins football game which had just started. Maybe five minutes they've been playing because it started at one o'clock and something like 1:05 they broke in with the announcement saying that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

**Q:** What was your reaction to that?

**GW:** Well, you heard so much about all these meetings but still you didn't expect something like that to happen. I couldn't believe it to tell you the truth.

**Q:** What year did you enter the service then?

**GW:** September, 1940.

**Q:** Were you drafted or enlisted?

**GW:** I was enlisted, the draft didn't start until October of that year. The draft- they pulled the first number out of the fish bowl on my 21st birthday in October, I was still in boot camp in Parris Island.

**Q:** Which branch did you choose to enlist in?

**GW:** Marine Corps

**Q:** Where did you train before you entered the Pacific.

**GW:** Parris Island, South Carolina - same place they train today.

**Q:** What was that like?

**GW:** Boot camp - very rough, it's a different experience. Tough really because it's a completely different way of life.

**Q:** How long did that last before you went over?

**GW:** I think in those days it was twelve weeks.

**Q:** When you finally entered the war, what battles were you involved in? What was your first battle that you fought?

**GW:** We landed in Tulagi on August 7, 1942. In fact, our battalion made the very amphibious landing in the Pacific. We landed an hour before the 1st Marine division landed in Guadalcanal, we landed 8:00 in the morning and they landed at 9:00. In history, we are listed as making the first amphibious landing of World War 2.

**Q:** What did you do after that? What were your objectives?

**GW:** At the time we landed there, I was in the demolition platoon and our function was, when we weren't being used as a demolition platoon, we did patrolling for the battalion and then, at night, we served as security for the colonel's command post.

**Q:** How did you feel during your first experience? When you first began in combat, when you first entered the war?

**GW:** It's kind of hard to explain because you can't say you are scared then because there are too many things going on. You're probably more scared afterwards when you think about all the things that happened then you are right when it's happening. It's kind of hard to explain, it's a strange situation.

**Q:** So, how long were you on Tulagi for?

**GW:** We landed on August 7th and we stayed there until August 30th so we were there a little over three weeks. Actually, what happened when we landed, we were only supposed to be there three days. It wasn't in the plans for us to even stay there, as soon as we captured Tulagi, we were supposed to go back to New Caledonia and train for another mission. But, what happened after they had that huge naval battle on the second night and all our ships left, we didn't have any way to leave there so we had to stay.

**Q:** So, you just kind of waited after?

**GW:** Well, there were deciding. Things were getting a little tougher in Guadalcanal than they had anticipated so they decided to use us, the fact that they were there. So, they sent a couple of these old World War 2 APDs [they were transports made from old force destroyers in the old World War One days] - they were the same ships that we landed on Tulagi to begin with. They sent them over and we went to Guadalcanal on them.

**Q:** What did you do on Guadalcanal?

**GW:** Well, we were there about eight days and they decided to make a raid on a place called Tanambogo because the Japanese had been landing troops night after night. They'd send a few hundred down on destroyers, land them, and get out of there before daylight. So, the general wanted to know what was going on. The only way to find out, we made a

landing on September 8th and found out that, yes there was a considerable force at Tanambogo which had already left there. So the colonel came back and the next morning he told the general the situation - how many troops he estimated there were three to four thousand troops there and that's when we went up and manned this position which turned out to be where the Battle of Bloody Ridge was three days later.

**Q:** What was that like - Battle of Bloody Ridge?

**GW:** Very intense. Probably the decisive battle of the whole campaign. In fact, history would record that without the Raider battalion we probably would not have held Guadalcanal, no question about it. I'm not saying that because I was in the Raider battalion but anyone that studied Marine Corp history can attest to the fact that we saved the airfield that night because without it, it would have been another Bataan Death March.

**Q:** Where did you go from there? What did you do after that?

**GW:** In fact, in the Battle of Bloody Ridge, just to give you an idea, two men in our battalion won the Congressional Medal of Honor and there were thirteen Navy Crosses awarded to men in our battalion just for that one battle which is unheard of. For example, in the whole war in Iraq there has only been only four or five Navy Crosses awarded in both wars in the Gulf War [further research showed that as of March 6, 2018, there were twenty-two Navy Crosses awarded for the Iraq conflict during 2003-2011 [Marine Corp Navy Crosses - Iraq Conflict](#)]

**Q:** What did you do in that battle?

**GW:** I started out, I was in the demolition platoon. We had forty men and we hadn't lost any, I think we had one person evacuated for sickness, so we had like thirty-nine men. When we ordered to take up those positions north of Henderson field along the ridge on September 10th, two days before the Battle of Bloody Ridge, Colonel Edson needed men in the rifle companies more than he needed the demolition platoon. So, he split up the demolition platoon and sent us all to different rifle companies. So I wound up in the machine gun section of B Company and only because my old platoon leader in the demolition platoon had been made the company commander of B Company the day before because one captain got sick and then the next day another one got sick.

**Q:** What kind of sick?

**GW:** Oh, dengue fever, malaria. We had lost quite a few to both dengue fever and malaria. They hadn't necessarily gotten evacuated from there, we got some of them back but they were in sick bay recovering. The regular company commander of B Company, Captain Wheeler, was one - he later came back.

**Q:** Were you ever sick and had dengue?

**GW:** No, fortunately I was very healthy.

**Q:** Did you ever meet [Colonel] Edson?

**GW:** Oh yes. I had a strange occurrence the first time I had ever met Colonel Edson. I joined the 1st Battalion 5th Marines in Quantico, Virginia, May 29th, '41. At the time I

joined, they were getting ready to make maneuvers up and down the East Coast. The 1st Battalion 5th Marines and Edson was awarded the job of rewriting the amphibious landing manuals for the whole Marine Corp. So they sent these APDs, World War One destroyers, they made APDs out of it - I don't know what it stands for [AP-transport, D-destroyer]. They sent them right up the Potomac River to Quantico and we loaded on there and we left right from there. That was something like June 20th/21st. It was only two-three weeks after I joined. We left and went down the river and we went to what is now Camp Lejeune which was under construction at that time, it was only a tent camp but it's where Camp Lejeune is today. We made landings for about two or three days and as strange as it seems, about the third day I came back to the ship and of all things, I came down with the mumps which created a real panic. The doctor went up to see Colonel Edson and he said "we gotta get him off the ship before he contaminates the whole...everybody that's on here." So they got permission to make a speed run, and this occurred about eight or nine o'clock at night. They made a speed run from Onslow Beach, North Carolina to Charleston Navy Yard, South Carolina. I'll never forget it - we got there about midnight and it was dark and you couldn't go in there because they didn't have a pilot - there was a long break water at the harbor in Charleston and you couldn't go in there at night. They sent an old whale boat out there, threw an old cargo net over the side, and I went down over the side into this whale boat and I did, I looked up and Colonel Edson and the doctor were both there watching me leave it - at midnight. So after, I got out of the hospital -I stayed in the hospital seven/eight/nine days something like that, I can't remember exactly how many- and the policy was and I think it's still the same today, if that happens when you get out of the hospital they just send you to the nearest....I wound up getting transferred to the old marine barracks at Charleston Navy Yard, one of the oldest barracks dated back to the Civil War days. I didn't think I was going to stay there, I wasn't aware of the regulations of course. So the first sergeant said "Oh, you're here to stay. We are going to send back to Quantico and get all your equipment. You're here." About two to three days later, I went downtown one night and I found out that the ships had come in for the weekend from Onslow Beach. So I said "Ooh, I gotta get out of here." So I went down to the ship and I saw the adjutant and I told him "What are my chances of getting back on the battalion?". He said, "Oh I don't know - I'll give you a form and you go see the Colonel and tell him your story." So I did. I went in there and I laid it right on the line. I said, "I love the 1st Battalion 5th [Marines] and I don't want to stay in this barracks. I want to get back in the outfit." So he says, "Well, go back to the barracks and I'll see what I can do." I went back and within the hour, the first sergeant comes down and I'll quote - to this day I'll never forget it. His face was as red as a Marine Corp flag. His words were "Who the hell do you know, Franklin Roosevelt?" He says, "Pack your bags, you're going back to the ship." He did an about face and away he went. Boy, I'll tell ya - he was not a happy camper. That was my first experience with Colonel Edson and here I was a lowly private with a year in the Marine Corp. He was a man of action, I don't know how he arranged it but it didn't take long.

**Q:** So after you were on Guadalcanal, what did you do from there?

**GW:** After we left Guadalcanal, we went back to New Caledonia. We left Guadalcanal October 13th, the night of another big naval battle. In fact, the night in history, the night the Boise got hit and almost sunk in this naval battle and it wound up that we escorted the Boise back to New Caledonia.

**Q:** What battle was that?

**GW:** It was only the second naval battle they had. The first naval battle was the second night we were...I think August 8th - Battle of Savo Island when we lost the four cruisers.

**Q:** And that's when the navy took off? Didn't the navy leave?

**GW:** Yeah, they left after that, the next morning. I looked out and there was nothing. Everything left. But then, the Japanese had been in there a few times bringing troops in but we didn't have enough ships there to challenge them at all. We finally had a few in there. So the second naval battle off of there actually occurred the night of the 13th and we left. They had brought in the new battleship The Washington, The Boise, and three or four other cruisers and put up a pretty good battle that night.

**Q:** Do you remember the name of the ship you guys were on?

**GW:** Yeah. We left on the old McCawley that had brought in an Army regiment - the first Army troops to help out in Guadalcanal. It came in on the same ship and we left on it after they unloaded the same day.

**Q:** What was your most memorable experience from the war?

**GW:** Probably the Battle of Bloody Ridge.

**Q:** Was that two nights?

**GW:** Yeah. Two nights.

**Q:** Did you receive any medals during that?

**GW:** I didn't. No.

**Q:** Did you receive any medals during the whole war?

**GW:** No.

**Q:** So you were never wounded?

**GW:** No.

**Q:** Was there any experience that was really humorous that sticks in your mind from your whole war experience?

**GW:** I think probably the strangest thing that happened to me was in the First Battle of the Matanikau River, I think in September about a week or ten days after Bloody Ridge, when we went out to Matanikau for the first time. I was standing watch on a machine gun and it was raining. And I hear a big thud and I thought a Japanese was in the trees and I didn't know what it was. I hear this big thud and it really scared the heck out of me and what it was, a big iguana about a foot long had fallen out of the tree. He hit the ground and went scampering off - he probably was as scared as I was. [laughter]

**Q:** What was that battle like?

**GW:** That got to be intense. They were on one side and we were on the other. But we were able to hold them off, they weren't able to cross the river that night. But it did get a little intense.

**Q:** Did you lose a lot of men during that battle?

**GW:** Not that night. We went out there a second time, on October 9th and 10th, I think, about three or four days before we left the island. The Second Battle of Matanikau - we lost quite a few guys that night.

**Q:** Did you ever meet Admiral Goss?

**GW:** Angus Goss? Yeah, he was my platoon leader. I knew him very well. I was his platoon sergeant in New Georgia when he got killed. I knew him very well.

**Q:** What was he like?

**GW:** Probably the greatest marine and CO that I had ever met in my life. He was a great, great guy. Fortunately, he took a liking to me for some reason right when I first joined the 1st Battalion 5th [Marines] at Quantico. In the summer of '41, they came out with [I was in the 81st Mortars then], they came out with six dollar a month pay for the four guys that were gunners and I was the first one in the battalion to get that six bucks. Well, when you are making twenty one dollars a month, when you make six more dollars, boy that's a big raise. It's the same as getting promoted to PFC [private first class]. But then later on, in New Georgia, the following [trails off]...we were training to go to New Georgia in April '43, by that time, in the Raiders.....let's step back a little bit. In the Raiders, I went from private to platoon sergeant in fourteen months in the Raiders.

**Q:** What did you have to do to go up in rank like that?

**GW:** Oh, just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Also, a lot of luck at it - also I worked hard at it too.

**Q:** You have to have some kind of leadership skills, right?

**GW:** Yeah. I made corporal march right after I joined the Raiders. Then, I made sergeant in November after we got back to New Caledonia after Guadalcanal. And then in April of '43 before we went to New Georgia, I made platoon sergeant. In the demolition platoon, we had three sergeants. I've always felt very fortunate and we were all great friends. We had all been in the 81st Mortars together, the old 5th Marines, and Goss had a tough decision - he had to make one of the three of us platoon sergeant and fortunately he selected me. And I've always been thankful for that.

**Q:** How much older was he than you?

**GW:** He was probably, he had joined the Marine Corp in 1929-he was an old China marine, he was probably about 33 or 34 years old when he got killed. I don't know exactly, I knew at one time [further research showed that he was 33 years old]. I think he was born in 1909

which would have made him ten years older than I was [further research showed he was born in January 8, 1910]. Seems like I remember, 1909 I think.

**Q:** What was the fighting like in New Georgia? Was it much different?

**GW:** New Georgia was a tough campaign physically. Very tough. Tougher than Tulagi because we had landed on the opposite side of the island and we had to go about six miles through the jungle and all they had was one trail - we had to run the whole battalion single file the whole way. They had natives out there with machetes just cutting a trail - can you imagine marching 800 and something men single file. And it was also very scary because you didn't know at any time when you were going to get attacked so militarily it was a tough way to go.

**Q:** Was it [unclear 27:06]?

**GW:** Unfortunately, our first objective was a place called Enogai Inlet on the opposite side and we reached there without...we only had one little skirmish on about the third day I think, nothing major. But physically that was a tough...One day, I think Joe Alexander writes it in our book, one day we didn't even go a mile one day, we went something like a half-mile because what had happened, I forget the name of this creek, it was in the rainy season...we had people in our battalion, Captain Boyd, took a reconnaissance party up there and actually scouted this area but before the rainy season. We get to this stream where we are supposed to walk across and it was a raging river by the time we were there. So, we had to march a whole battalion across this log single file which literally took hours because people fell off the log and they had to fish them out of the river and it was a little bit scary walking across there with all your equipment on your back. In the demolition platoon we were carrying an extra load because we had a demolition pack strapped on the back of our pack with the TNT in it, every man had a load of that in addition then we had things like bangalore torpedoes [it's like a two or three inch tube packed with TNT]-we had people carrying those. So New Georgia was a really physically demanding campaign.

**Q:** So where did you go after New Georgia?

**GW:** We came back to New Caledonia and I came home.

**Q:** When you were in Guadalcanal and New Georgia, did you ever come in contact with the civilians?

**GW:** No, there weren't any civilizations. They all took off for the hills or whatever was there because they had to escape from the Japanese. The only thing that was in Guadalcanal other than the Japanese was they had some Korean workers building the airfield. Bob [Addison, also an Edson Raider] and I were talking about it last weekend, he asked me the same question. We wondered what ever happened to those workers, what did we do with them, and I don't know whether we took them off the island or left them there. I don't know what happened to them. In fact, I had never thought about it until Bob Addison had raised that question when we were talking about it last weekend.

**Q:** Did you know Bob [Addison] when you were there?

**GW:** Yeah. Bob was in the same platoon with me. When he joined the Marine Corp, they were enlisting about 500 a day which was an awful lot of people because Parris Island couldn't handle that many after the war started. So what had happened, Bob's platoon only went through with three weeks of training in Parris Island and they sent him to Quantico to fire the rifle range because there was a big snag there they were backing them up so much they just had to get them out of there because Parris Island was the only boot camp the Marine Corp had. They just couldn't handle it so they started sending a few hundred at a time to Quantico to fire the rifle range part of it and then when Edson formed the Raiders in February '42 he needed about 300 guys in a hurry to fill out the battalion so he and some of the officers went down there and got them. They made a big speech to all these guys and wound up getting all kinds of volunteers. He got to 300 without any problem and that's when Bob joined the 81 Mortar platoon of the Raiders that I was in.

**Q:** Wasn't he from Ohio?

**GW:** He was originally from Ohio. Yup.

**Q:** You were from where?

**GW:** I was from right here, I was originally from Fort Ann.

**Q:** So how did he wind up here?

**GW:** He took the job at ACC [Adirondack Community College] as athletic director. What had happened, Bob got selected for the V-12 program which is an officer program where you go to college. When you finish college, you make second lieutenant in the Marine Corp and you have a certain obligation. Bob was in there, he had started that in the beginning of '44 after we had come back from overseas [he came back the same time as I did and we were in Camp Elliott]. When the war ended, Bob had only had a couple of semesters and then they discharged him from the Marine Corp and he finished college. Then he met Dr. Eisenhart, they had taught at the same, I think Denison College in Ohio. Bob had met Eisenhart who was the president [of ACC], I think it was Denison. So the year after Eisenhart came to Glens Falls, he needed an athletic director so he got in touch with Bob or vice versa and so Bob put twenty-nine years in as athletic director of ACC.

**Q:** It's kind of a coincidence that you both kind of wound up in the same geographic region.

**GW:** Well, the funny thing was, after I retired from the Army in March '62, that summer Bob got transferred in and he came into Sears to buy his appliances and he looked over there and he walked over and he says, "I know you from somewhere." And I knew the face but you're talking twenty years after because the last time I saw Bob was in 1943 in Camp Elliott so it's like nineteen years later. We got talking about the Marine Corp and the minute he said "Marine Corp" then I remembered. Bob's squad leader was...he joined...a guy named Erwin Combs, he still goes to my reunion. He was Bob's squad leader in the 81 Mortars. We had four guns so four squads so I knew who he was but I didn't know him that well.

**Q:** During the war, how often did you write home?

**GW:** If I was able to, I used to write about once a week except when we were in combat, I couldn't. In fact, my mother lived to almost 102 years old and she had all the letters I ever sent her. I have them all, after she passed away I have all the old letters I ever sent her.

**Q:** Was there any point in the war where things got really tough and you just felt like going home and giving up and didn't know what else to do?

**GW:** No. I like the Marine Corp. That's why I stayed in. I like the service.

**Q:** Was that mostly how everyone else felt or was it just you?

**GW:** When the war ended, I was a gunnery sergeant which wasn't too bad. I made gunnery sergeant four years in the Marine Corp which was good. I came back and I looked around a little bit and I decided that I was going to stay in.

**Q:** Did you have any experiences with lack of materials or supplies during the war or was that mostly not you? Or food.

**GW:** We had a lot of problems, in New Georgia, we didn't have food for thirty-six hours one time. They had to parachute in K-rations to us because the campaign lasted much longer than they had anticipated so we ran out of a lot of things.

**Q:** What was your objective in New Georgia?

**GW:** To take the north part of, up around Rice Anchorage, I forget the name of the area. The Army had already taken the south end, down where Munda airfield was. We were in the northern part opposite Kolombangara Island which was only about three miles across from where we were at Enogai inlet and they were sitting over there with three thousand troops and they didn't have any transportation so fortunately that saved us otherwise, we would have been a pretty precarious situation.

**Q:** How did Angus Goss die?

**GW:** You know, for a long time they didn't know but he got shot in the back of the head by a sniper. The very last battle that we were in, the last day we were in combat.

**Q:** Where was that?

**GW:** At a place called Bairoko Harbor which was a very, very bad experience. Which should have never taken place in the first place cause we didn't have the troops to do it, it should have never been attempted.

**Q:** Who's call was that?

**GW:** The regimental commander...the 4th Raider battalion was up there with us on a regimental basis. I'm trying to think of this colonel's name...I can't think of it right now, anyway, our colonel was Sam Griffith who had replaced Edson [he was an exec under Edson and he took over when Edson got transferred]. The second time I went overseas, January '45, I joined the 3rd division in Guam as a replacement after Iwo Jima. We stayed

there, in fact, I landed as a replacement on D-Day in Iwo Jima, February 19th is the day we got to Guam with three replacement battalions that we going to stay there until the division got back from Iwo [Jima]. But when things got bad, two of the three wound up going to Iwo Jima, they got so short-handed, the one that I was in was the only one that didn't go. When they came back from Iwo Jima, Sam Griffith, received a spot promotion to bird colonel to take over the 21st Marines. I guess he looked over rosters, I suppose, when you reach that level. Anyway, the first outfit that he came down to inspect was the 81st Mortar platoon. I was gunnery sergeant in the 81 Mortars in the 1st Battalion 21st. He walked right up to me. We became quite close and then there was another fellow named Paul Ward, I didn't know him in the Raiders, but he had the same job in the 2nd Battalion 21st that I had, he was a gunnery sergeant for the mortars. So, Sam Griffith used to invite us on weekend. If we didn't go up there, he got on the phone and called for us to come up there because he loved the Raiders and he loved to talk about them. One of the discussions that we had up there, I'll never forget it, he admitted what a mistake it was...we only had two rifle companies by that time..manpower wise we sent two rifle companies out there [to Bairoko Harbor] from the 1st Raider battalion and two from the 4th Raider battalion, that's all. Expecting to take that harbor and no one knows how many....they had defenses there it was unbelievable. We spent a whole day there and we wound up...I think in the 1st Raiders we had over twenty killed that day just in a few hours and I don't know how many wounded. And we hadn't even come close to the objective.

**Q:** What was the job of the gunnery sergeant?

**GW:** It's the same as today. Gunnery sergeant, actually the 1st sergeant handles the administrative part of the company, and the gunnery sergeant handles all the other things like how much ammunition you have left, rations, and everything concerning that company. He helps the captain out doing that portion of it where obviously the 1st sergeant does the administrative end of it. The gunnery sergeant in a mortar platoon does all the training, it's a little different situation. Primarily concerned with training, keeping track of your ammunition, things of that nature.

**Q:** How did you feel towards the Japanese people during the war?

**GW:** I never held it against them. I figured "hey, they are doing their job just like we were." A lot of people did but I never held it against them.

**Q:** Is that how you feel today?

**GW:** I don't hold it against them.

**Q:** Did you see anyone during that war that had battle fatigue or was shell-shocked?

**GW:** Yeah, we had a few guys that had battle fatigue. Navy called it "combat fatigue" which was the term that the Marine Corp used.

**Q:** What was that like?

**GW:** You know the funny thing is I got evacuated from New Georgia and what I had, our doctor evaluated me as having gastroenteritis which is a stomach problem caused by not eating the right kind of food. Our doctor evacuated me and I flew to a naval hospital in Tulagi. Years later, it really disturbed me - I looked at my records and in there at Tulagi, the guy had changed it to combat fatigue. I couldn't believe it.

**Q:** Why did he do that?

**GW:** I don't know. They didn't find anything. I stayed in the hospital for about a week and I was eating regular then I felt fine.

**Q:** So, he probably just made an assumption and wrote it down?

**GW:** Yeah cause there were a lot of guys in there that had combat fatigue so he probably figured "well that's it, that's the easiest diagnosis so we'll just write down combat fatigue."

**Q:** So where were you when you heard the war was over?

**GW:** I was in Guam. In fact, I was in the 3rd Division in Guam and we were within about one week of leaving to go to the Philippines to join the 10th Army and make the invasion in Honshu, southern Japan if the war hadn't have ended.

**Q:** So, did it come as a surprise or was it sort of anticipated?

**GW:** Yeah, it came as a very good surprise. Knowing what your next objective is, the homeland of Japan, didn't sound....and I only kind of found that out because Sam Griffith kind of hinted at that, he didn't want to come right out and say where we were going to go but I found out that the 1st Battalion 21st that I was in was going to be the assault battalion on the southern tip of Honshu Island on a place called Kagoshima. And after the war ended, the 2nd Marine division went there on occupation and they found that that thing was nothing but a honeycomb of guns in the side of the mountain equivalent to what they had in Iwo Jima that whole tip of that island.

**Q:** So you probably wouldn't be sitting here?

**GW:** You're right. Yeah that would have been - not good. Plus, you know the Japanese would have been fanatical on their homeland much more so...they were fanatical enough at times on some of those islands not saying what they would have done when you set foot on Honshu.

**Q:** You didn't shed any tears when the atomic bomb was dropped?

**GW:** No. The only thing about that, for many years, my wife and I always had the discussion about the atomic bomb. I always felt that about ten or fifteen years ago that it was very inhumane because they had not picked a real military target. They actually killed about 80,000 civilians, all civilians had been killed in Hiroshima. I always thought that war or no war, we should have picked a real military target for the first atom bomb that we were going to drop. Something strictly military, I just didn't think that it was a military target. But then, ten to fifteen years ago I kind of changed my mind. I thought, reverse the

situation and they had the atomic bomb, they probably would have been over here in New York City if they had the chance. So I thought 'war is war' so I kind of changed my mind a little bit to what I did at first. But I still think the United States should have picked more of a military target something like the shipyards at Tokyo, something that would have been strictly a military target. Do you agree with me or haven't you ever thought of it in that terms?

**Q:** It's one of those questions. Yeah, of course but then again, I'm not in the President's shoes to make that kind of decision.

**GW:** Yeah, I have never had....I don't know if history has ever said why Truman picked out Hiroshima to be the target.

**Q:** I don't even know if he did.

**GW:** Well, he must have had the final decision.

**Q:** Well, they had secondary targets, of course, and I know Nagasaki, the second one, was a secondary target because of the cloud cover and whatnot.

**GW:** But Nagasaki was a military target though - where they dropped that one.

**Q:** How did the other men react to the dropping of the atomic bomb?

**GW:** I never really discussed what I'm saying here with other people. Of course, naturally, everyone was glad when the war ended. Then we sat around for three months waiting for them to decide what to do with us.

**Q:** How long was it before you arrived home after that?

**GW:** Well, they dropped the bomb and the war ended August 15th. We sat in Guam until December 20th doing nothing, absolutely nothing.

**Q:** How did they keep you occupied there?

**GW:** Well they tried to setup a few schools, courses and things, anything to keep you busy. Of course, guys with enough points, reserves and everything, they got to go home. But guys like me, with time left, I went to Northern China in occupation and I didn't get back until August '46.

**Q:** What did you do when you got home?

**GW:** Well, went out on leave and then I stayed in, I re-enlisted.

**Q:** What was China like? What was your job there?

**GW:** I went to a place called Tsingtao, China. In fact, Tony Luciano from Hudson Falls was there. He was in the same...I visited Tony once. My mother sent me a newspaper clipping or something and I'd remembered reading about him...Seton Hall and everything...I knew he was in the Marine Corp and I found out...I was in the 2nd Battalion 4th Marines in Tsingtao and he was in the 3rd Battalion. I visited him one time. We were living in the Shandong

University, we took over the whole university compound. The commoners got a little bit, they started putting search lights up in the mountains and shining them down at night. I had the 81 Mortar platoon and the 2nd Battalion 4th and they sent us out to the airfield. They had an airfield called Yangkou, about fifteen miles outside of Tsingtao. They finally chased the marines out of there in '48 or '49 and then took that place over. Tsingtao is renamed to another city now, I don't know what it's called, it's not Tsingtao now, it's something else [further research showed that Tsingtao is Qingdao]. We had to disarm all the Japanese...the Japanese had quite an army in the Tsingtao peninsula. Some 30 or 40,000 or so, we had to disarm them. They had a big ceremony at the race track and they all had to lay down their weapons. Then, we had to start shipping them back to...they put about 1,000 of them on an LST [tank landing ship] and ship them back to Japan and we had to send guys along to guard them. Took quite a while just to get that army out of there. But that was a really downtrodden place for the Japanese during the war where people didn't have very much, in fact, they'd come in at night and rob your garbage can, that's how hungry they were.

**Q:** So, when did you arrive home from China?

**GW:** August '46 I came back.

**Q:** What did you do then, did you go back to college?

**GW:** No, I stayed in the Marine Corp and I went to Earle, NJ to the Naval Ammunition Depot and I only stayed there about three months. Unfortunately, the same thing happened that happened to me with that ship deal. Light cruiser of the Little Rock pulled into Brooklyn Navy Yard and he had a gunnery sergeant on there and he got sick and he reported into that naval hospital they had there in Long Island (I can't remember the name of it right now). So they had the authority to reach out and grab a guy, the nearest guy. I got over there, it was three o'clock in the afternoon to be in the Brooklyn Navy Yard by nine o'clock the next morning. So I wound up on the U.S.S. Little Rock for eighteen months.

**Q:** What were you doing on that?

**GW:** We had a detachment of fifty marines, I was the detachment gunnery sergeant. Very interesting job. I liked it. Got to do lot of interesting things. Made a Mediterranean cruise which I would have never seen otherwise.

**Q:** So what did you do after the eighteen months on the Little Rock?

**GW:** I came back to the States on the Little Rock after the Mediterranean cruise and the first sergeant called me in one day and wanted to know, he says "They put a bulletin out there, desperate need of recruiters in the Marine Corp, would you be interested?" I said, "I don't know, I've never thought about it. I said give me a couple days to think about it and I'll let you know." I thought about it for a couple days and I said you know that sounds like a pretty good job. I'll think I'll try it so I put in for recruiter school. I wound up putting in thirty-nine months of recruiting in Philadelphia, district headquarters in Philadelphia. In fact, I was on recruiting in Philadelphia when the Korean war broke in June '50. A lot of

people don't realize that occurred on a Sunday also, June 25th was a Sunday also same as Pearl Harbor. I will never forget the next morning when I came to work you wouldn't believe the line of kids that were outside that door to join the Marine Corp. Unbelievable.

**Q:** So what did you do after recruiting?

**GW:** It was automatic, the Korean War going of course, you got out of recruiting and you went to Korea. No questions asked. Naturally after being away from everything all that time, they sent you to Camp Pendleton, you had to go through a three month refresher course before you go to Korea.

**Q:** Did you see combat in Korea?

**GW:** I did and I didn't. I was fortunate. The major that I worked for, his father was a retired admiral, and about (I left recruiting in December '51) I'd say September or October, he called me into the office one day and said "You ever thought about taking a commission in the Marine Corp?" I said, "No, I never thought about it." He said, "Well, the Marine Corp has a program out course they need officers fast so the quickest way to get them in an emergency like the Korean War is to commission NCOs (gunnery sergeants and master sergeants) and I had made master sergeant in June '51 after the Korean War started. So what they did in '50, '51, and '52, they commissioned 500 master sergeants and gunnery sergeants three different times so that 1500 they had commissioned. I made it in '52, the last time they did it. I thought it over a couple days and I went back and thought maybe. I said well if you are going to stay in, why not get all you can out of it. It's a chance. So I went to Korea and I was there about a month when my commission came through. When I first went to Korea, seeing I had mortar experience, the Marine Corp had taken 4.2 mortars and previous to that they had never had anything larger than an 81 mortar. So, they had a job called Fire Direction Center Chief which is a master sergeant and you direct 4.2 mortars are fired like artillery out of a Fire Direction Center, different than the other ones. I had that job in the 1st Marines and when my commission went through they wouldn't leave you in the same outfit. They want you transferred to another so I left there and I went to 5th Marines, back to my old 5th Marines again. My old company commander of the Raiders was the executive of the 5th Marines and Lou Walt, who had also been in the Raiders and everybody had heard of Lou Walt who commanded all the marines in Vietnam and retired a four-star general. So I'd always figured that they looked over that list and saw my name on there, I don't know for sure. I never got to talk to Lou Walt the whole time I was there. I called my old company commander a few times on the phone and we'd talk back and forth but I never came out and asked him. I never got to see him because I'm up there and they are back. I never saw either one of them while I was there.

Which leads me to getting a little bit ahead... That's why I left the Marine Corp to go into the Army in 1957 because I realize, I'm thirty-six years old and they don't want thirty-six year old lieutenants. When you are thirty-six years old in the Marine Corp, either you are a major or a lieutenant colonel by then. So I understood the situation, that I was going to revert back to master sergeant. Well I found out about this program that you are able to go

into the Army and keep my commission and my seniority and everything. When I got out of the Marine Corp, I was stationed at Fleet Reinforced Atlantic it was in Norfolk, Virginia. We had a three-star general and a two-star general, in fact, General Peter Pace is now the Chairman, the Joint Chief of Staff had that job back in the late '90s. I went to a party one night out in Little Creek, Virginia and I met a guy that I had served with in World War Two and he had been commissioned the same time I did. He was telling me that I'm going into the Army. I said, "What do you mean you are going into the Army?" Because we had already gotten the letter that as of the 1st of the year we were going to get reverted back to master sergeant. So, he said "I've already gotten the paperwork, I've already been accepted." He says are you interested, I'll tell you who to contact in the Pentagon and that's it. I said "Well, I'm not really interested but who knows what will happen. Maybe. Give me his address, name, phone number and everything and if I decide to do it at least I'll have it. The last job I had in the Marine Corp, I was Top Secret Control Officer for this corp headquarters. Well, in the Marine Corp and I think it's probably the same way today, you can't destroy top secret documents. It all has to be done at headquarters of the Marine Corp. Secret and below you take over to burn dept in Norfolk and you dump them over there and record it and you can do that. But top secret, every six months, you have to take an armed guard, you put them in a vehicle, and you take them up to headquarters in the Marine Corp and they do the accountability and everything. I had already gotten the letter saying I going to revert back in June of '57. June 30th I was going to revert back to master sergeant. In March, I had to made a trip up the headquarters Marine Corp to take these documents up there so I said while I'm up there I may as well stop in the enlisted detail section and find out where I might...I mean I had a couple kids in school...and just find out where I might be transferred after I became a master sergeant. So I walked i there and posed this questions to this captain that was sitting behind the desk. Well, he got all bent out of shape. He said "yeah, all you guys are all running in there now, you all want to run the gravy train now that you've been officers." I said "wait a minute now, I'm not looking for any big favors. I just want one simple answer where I might be transferred." "Waaahhh", he's still carrying on. I was staying overnight and going back to Norfolk the next day. I went back to the hotel and I got thinking about that conversation. I said, I had sixteen years going on seventeen years in the Marine Corp and I would never retire any higher than an enlisted man because I didn't have ten years commissioned service and I said, you know I'm going to run into guys just like him and I'm going to listen to that the rest of the time I'm in. I said, you know that Army sounds like a pretty good deal to me. The next morning, I had that kid drive me down to the Pentagon, fortunately this guy had given me all the directions where to find him because if you didn't know which door to go into the Pentagon, forget it. There is literally thousands of entrances to that place, it's unbelievable. I had never been in there before and I never went in there since then, I wouldn't want to. But anyway, by having the having the exact door number and everything, I was able to walk in there and bingo, I found this colonel's name, Stephenson (I forget). He gave me a bunch of papers and he says you'll be hearing from us probably in a few days at tops a week. This was on a Wednesday. Friday morning, about seven o'clock in the morning, I'm drinking my coffee getting ready to go to work and the phone rings and it's

this colonel from the Pentagon. He's saying, "Yup, you're in. You're all set. We are going to take you. We are going to send you this mountain of papers, fill them out just as soon as you can and send them back to me and I'll give you all the instructions of what to do." So I did and he had to do it before the 30th of June because he had to do it while you were still commissioned in the Marine Corp. So what they do is they give you a date, you resign your commission one date in the Marine Corp and you get sworn in the Army the next day. So he sent me all these papers and I resigned my commission the 16th of June, '57 and I got sworn in the same day, effective the next day because you can't be in two the same day and you don't want any break in service so they made it out effective the next day. They gave you your choice, either I could get sworn in the Marine Corp or I could go to Fort Monroe, Virginia, which is across the bay and have the Army swear me in. But I wanted the Marine Corp to swear me in because the colonel that I dealt with down there was the only guy in all my years of service that ever gave me a bad time that I couldn't get along with. I found out later, it took me a couple of years later, I found out through a buddy of mine that was stationed down in Norfolk there with me, why? He and Edson had tangled one time on a job out in Hawaii just before the end of World War Two when Edson, after he made general, he headed the Services Supply for Howlin' Mad Smith in Pearl Harbor. I guess this colonel was a major someplace and Edson went there about some inspection and then found something that he didn't like about this guy and boy, when he looked at my records and saw that I was in the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, forget it. [laughter]

Whatever I did with that guy...Well anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit. So, I said to myself and he got so mad when he found out that I was going into the Army, I found this out from the adjutant because the adjutant was a very good friend of mine. He was an ex-enlisted man and he got commissioned the same time I was. He told me that colonel got so mad when he found out that I was going to make out by going into the Army so I said I'm going to have him swear me in right here, I'm going to get him ticked off a little bit more so. In fact, this Dave Bornhauser was the guy's name, the adjutant, he was the one who swore me in the Army.

**Q:** So, before you went into the Army, did you say you have kids?

**GW:** I had a son and a daughter.

**Q:** So, how long were you with the Army before you came back?

**GW:** I only had to put in four years and nine months in. The deal was when we went in, they would give us exactly the number of time to complete the ten years commissioned service, right to the day and that was it. So I knew when I went in, and I went in the Army on the 17th of June '57, I knew that on 31 March of '62 that I was going to retire from the Army. On that day because that gave me to the nearest month, you have to retire that last day of the month so that gave me my ten years commissioned service with a few days extra.

**Q:** What year was that?

**GW:** March 31st '62.

**Q:** That was my first birthday.

**GW:** Really.

**Q:** I was one year old on that day.

**GW:** Yeah, I retired from Camp Drum. There was another captain, I was in Fort Richardson, Alaska for two and half years, my last tour. In fact, I only served in three places in the Army in four years and nine months. Served in Fort Monmouth, NJ from June '57 to September '58. In September '58, I went to Alaska until May '61 and I only had ten months left to do so I only served in three places.

**Q:** Sounds like a good deal.

**GW:** It did. It worked out great. Worked out. I have a lot of things to thank the Army for. I really didn't want to, I would have preferred to stay in the Marine Corp but financially there's no comparison, I mean at that point in your life you are thinking of...There's a lot of difference retiring as a captain versus retiring as a master sergeant.

**Q:** Laura, do you have any more questions? So after you retired from the army, what did you do from there?

**GW:** As I was driving back and forth to Camp Drum on the weekends, I noticed that new Sears store being constructed up on the old Queensbury Plaza, all that winter. I said that looks like a pretty good thing, that store was going to open in June so I applied for a job there and I was very fortunate, I got hired as a division manager because of the openings they had there going from a real small store to a large store. So I got a good deal out of it and I got hired as a division manager off the street. So I worked there for another twenty-one years.

**Q:** In what ways did you think that your war experience influenced your life?

**GW:** Well I think the service got me that division manager's job when he interviewed me. I could tell right away that's why he hired me as a division manager because I had that background of all that service in the Marine Corp and the Army so it helped me there.

**Q:** Do you have anything else you would like to add that hasn't been talked about?

**GW:** I'll say another thing, I thank God that I stayed in the service now when it comes to health care because I have Medicare and I have Tricare for Life which is a military insurance that covers the remaining twenty percent that Medicare doesn't cover and you get free prescription drugs. The only thing you have to pay for is three dollars per prescription to handle the shipping and handling. I had two angioplasty's, each one of them came to about forty thousand bucks so just the twenty percent of that, if I didn't have the Tricare for Life, would be about eight thousand dollars right there, twice. And prescription drugs, I'm on about eight and my wife is on about ten, I figured it out one time that it's got to be between two thousand and twenty-five hundred a month just for drugs. I'll tell you for a young guy today, there's a lot of things worse than going in the service cause they have a lot of good benefits.

**Q:** Do you ever go back and visit where you were during the war?

**GW:** I go down to Quantico every year, for the Raiders reunion, we are going to have one more and that's going to be it.

**Q:** What about over on the Pacific, on the islands?

**GW:** No, I never made any of those trips. I'd like to but it's a wee bit expensive. Yeah, we've had...I know one guy lived down in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, he went this summer, he's visited Guadalcanal three or four times. Jim Smith, our secretary/treasurer of the Raider association that handles all our reunions and everything, he's been over there twice. Some of the guys have but you're talking a lot of money to make a trip there. But you've got to go to Australia and then you've got to figure out how to get back there.

**Q:** It's very pretty, I hear.

**GW:** Well, there's not a lot of airlines that fly up there, you just about have to charter an airline to go into Guadalcanal. I don't think that they have any regular airline service. Yes, I'd like to be able to walk atop of Bloody Ridge today and look at that monument that's up there. I would like to. And the one other thing that I'd like to go there and I couldn't in my wildest imagination....the capital of Guadalcanal is a place called Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands. It has to be strange because it's a city of thirty thousand and it's built right on the area each side of the Matanikau River. The Matanikau River, that whole area, was a rain forest, you couldn't even see overhead. I can't imagine a city of thirty thousand there. I just visualize it - how they could physically build a city in the jungle like that. Every time I hear one of these guys come back that visited there, I always think "what did it look like?"

**Q:** That's neat. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**GW:** No, that's enough I guess.

**Q:** OK, Thank you very much. Thanks Gerry for coming in.

**GW:** You're welcome.