

**Joseph J. Meighan  
Veteran**

**Michael Aikey and Wayne Clarke  
New York State Military Museum  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed at NY National Guard Headquarters  
Latham, New York  
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Joseph J. Meighan: M  
Interview: I

I: We are in Latham Headquarters, interviewing Mr. Joseph J. Meighan, it is August 22, 2001, interviewer is Michael Aikey, videographer is Wayne Clarke.

I: Mr. Meighan, where were you born?

M: I was born in Troy, New York. August 12, 1922, I just turned 79.

I: You went to school in Troy?

M: Yes. I joined the Guard before I graduated high school.

I: Why did you join the Guard?

M: Well, in those days, a nickel was worth about a buck, and we got five dollars a month, and we were supposed to get a stipend that, if I signed you up, I would get five bucks, and I have not got a penny of it yet! And I have never been allowed to forget that. (laughs)

I: What was the Guard like at that point (in time)?

M: In 1938-39, same as it is today, you go away on maneuvers, once a year, and this one we went up to Camp Drum, the Racket River, I will never forget, it divides New York State and Canada, and we had to invade Canada, so we crossed the river, with our guns up, (gestures with arms above his head, as if wading), and we had to out by dark, so we got back. Then, in pass and review, we had our Brigadier General, Ogden J. Ross, he had a mustache, quiet and elderly gentleman, from World War One, and the funny thing there, I will never forget, every company has a runner, a clown, a joker, whatever you want to call him. This guy's name was Ester, he was a smoker, everybody smoked cigarettes in those days, I seen the event happen, and then after the ceremony, everybody was around Ester, and asked him, 'What did you do?' The general was up there reviewing the troops, and Ester had a cigarette and was looking for a match, so someone told him to go see the general, so he went up the general and said, 'Hey Oggie, have you got a match?' (laughing!) So that's what happened at Camp Drum. It was pretty cold, but Alabama was a dandy. Are you going ask me questions, in order?

I: We will try to do it in sequence.

M: Well, October, 1940 comes around, and the state armory in Troy, on 15th St. one drill night we were all called together, and were told we were shipping to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and we will be on maneuvers for 6 or 8 months. It was strange, the railroad station was in Troy at the time, and we all boarded trains early in the morning, and the city did not know about it, the only ones there were the immediate family, so we left by train. And we got down to Fort McClellan, Alabama, in October, we got set up, we had these tents, called pyramidal tents, it has a 2 x 4 frame with a wooden floor, and you have a Sibley stove, today you have a modern stove, back then it had a little door, and no flue, just a pipe up through the tent roof, and we had those critters cherry red, in the cold weather. My friend, Eddie Beaudoin (sp?), he was one fellow that was not a particularly a likeable man, it was around 2 o'clock in the morning, everybody snoring up a storm, and he says, 'C'mon, get outside!' There is snow and frost on the ground, and he says, 'Hurry up!' And Eddie had a can of urine, and that stove was cherry red, and he opened the door, poured that whole can in there and says, 'Watch this!' About 2 minutes later the other 4 come out screaming! (laughs!) That was brutal! (laughs) Of course Ed was not a trouble maker, he was always making fun of things. Our first maneuver, we went into the state of Mississippi, and we are living out in the woods, and did you ever hear of the chigger bug? Do you know what they can do? Well, you will never feel it, but it is like a little kernel of corn, and that will go into the pore of your skin, and when it burrows in there, it swells up. So Eddie got up, and he had a chigger bug right in his pecker (penis), and you don't feel nothing, we all followed him up to the doctor, and got a camera, so the doctor said, you have to cut them out with a scalpel to get them out. And there is no way you can do that on your penis. The only other way is to light a cigarette, and hold it, and it will back itself out. And after a little suffering, he got rid of that chigger (laughs).

I: So what were maneuvers like?

M: It's just like hunting for two and three days, that's all it is, you have a blue team and a red team, and we are trying to eliminate the others, and we were not allowed to go into the cities, it wasn't much on the sex like it is today, you respected people, and we were out with the farming areas, and we were told not to make friends with the families. The funny thing is, McIntosh is Mississippi, every time we go on a drill, a 20 mile hike, there was not much traffic in those days, there was a farmhouse and a beautiful girl, built like Venus, and very time a group would march by, she had a well, and they had to pump water then, and she is pumping water and showing her ass, and we called her Venus at the Pump. And we were told by our leaders, 'Look Straight Ahead!, Eyes Left!'

I: You were federalized by this time?

M: We were federalized before we left Troy. We left on the 10th of October, I will never forget that, and we went to Alabama and they are still fighting the Civil War there, and there was a 'Mr. B' on the radio, he had a drawl thick as syrup, and he did not like these, we are called one name, one syllable, 'Damnyankee'. And when we had leave, there was a little city in Georgia called Mineral Wells, and all the fellas who were looking for action got it, but then they gave it a nickname, 'Venereal Wells'. Other than that, we were running, packing, training, that stuff. In the winter time, when you get the call to fall in, you will wait until the last minute, you are not in a hurry to run out that door, it's cold weather, so, we had these fur coats, they are thick and heavy, and we came out to fall in, and they got the coat on, and the boots. And the sergeant

would go down the line, looking at everybody, and he points and says, 'You, take off your coat!' , and the guy is naked, and that is the way he would stay until you are dismissed! (laughs)

I: Now had you got any replacements?

M: No it was still all the original ones, when we got the replacements, then we had fun. Probably around March, you will see in those pictures, some of the companies got full strength, so around March we got all the draftees, and for some reason they all came from New York City. You had these latrines, these trenches dug, they had these cans, like a 55 gallon drum, and if you had to relieve yourself, you would go pee in the can. The Top Kick, that was Claire Hines, he had one tall guy and one little guy, and he had them carry the can , it was called a lavalier, and they carried it, and you can imagine what happened, (gestures with arms, swaying and sloshing, laughs). You remember the funny things, you forget the bad stuff.

I: Does the term OHIO ring a bell?

M: Yes, that's 'hello' in Japanese.

I: Over The Hill in October?

M: Oh, there was not much to that, there was some guys who had dependents, there were some who never went away, others who did go home, but that is when we left, the following October, in 41'. On December 7, 1941, the following morning, the whole division was lining up to hop on a train to go out west. From what I have read, the 27th Division was the first military unit that was combat ready, and then we were sent overseas. The first one. The trains were coal burners, steam heat but 4 or 5 cars back and you got no heat, and the soot is flying at you. There was a town, it was on the news and television a few years back, there is a little town in the northwest, and all of the troop trains that went through this town, the townspeople would turn out and would give us hot coffee and sandwiches they would pass them up through the windows, and they were recognized. At another stop, there was a fellow, he was shrewd, he was a liquor dealer, you could buy a bottle of wine for about 98 cents. So everyone would be hanging out with their buck, and I latched onto a bottle of this stuff, and the name, it is cheap stuff, and I have asked many bartenders, and back then you did not have much variety, only red, white, whatever, and this one was sweet, and I drank it with the rocking, and doors opening, breezes, and I got sick. I was passing in one end and puking the other. And that's the last I ever went for wine. When we got into Fort Ord, California, that was our next stop. And Fort Ord, you may know this, the B-29 was a military secret then, there it is, that's the one they are going use next, basically we did not do too much, maybe some close order drill to keep everybody in line, but it seemed like every day or two we would get a shot, and it got to the point, if you cut your finger it would coagulate. So we were loaded with some kind of drugs, and then we went to Hawaii. And we had a lot of fun on that English ship because the English, they were not too friendly with us, and they took a lot of abuse because they did not want to go, so we really laid on them. We were not told until we got to our destination that we were eating powdered eggs. Those ships had a latrine, like a row of benches, and there was a trough, and as the bow goes up and down, water gets pulled in, that was the plumbing. So a friend of mine got a bright idea, he and I went up to the bow, and after a meal, everyone has to go to the latrine, so it gets busy, so my friend gets a couple rolls of toilet paper, and we wad them into a big ball, and we light them, and when the ship goes down, we light them and release them , and they roll past the benches, and it burned their ass!(laughing). And we got to Hawaii, and the lei, and hula, we went right by it, to the

island of Hawaii, where there were no gooks at all!(laughs) Nothing but pineapples, we had to clean out our own area, next to the volcano, but that is where we were camping.

I: Were you training on Hawaii?

M: You were climbing the cliffs, rope ladders, and they would ask for volunteers, they would point at you, that's how it worked out. A few of us got to OCS, and after I got my commission, I wanted to go back to the 27th, so when I was discharged from Fort Benning, the Infantry Training Center, I went home, and my orders says to report to APO 27, San Francisco. I stayed home for about 30 days. I hopped on a plane, to Denver, Colorado. The weather was so bad, I was in Denver for 3 or 4 weeks! I finally got to California, then back to Hawaii. While waiting to transfer to Hawaii, I was temporarily assigned to the 81st Infantry Division, and we went to Needles, California, the hottest place in the US, then we went to Arizona, for desert training. In the desert in Arizona, there were 32 animals that we were not told about: one was the tarantula, one was the pack rat, and the other was the kangaroo rat. Every morning, arguments would break out in the tents. 'Hey you stole my watch, or ring,' that sort of thing. Headquarters investigated, and discovered that the pack rats were stealing shiny objects like watches and rings, then leave a small stone in its place. That's the pack rat! The kangaroo rat, they were looking for food, and they could jump from here to that wall. (points with finger). When I finally did get back to Honolulu, the 105th was there, and I stayed with them until the end.

I: You were assigned to what unit?

M: I was assigned to company M, weapons, I was 'Mike 3', that was my designation. I was a shave tail. The CO was William Ferns, we did not get along too good, personality wise, a little friction there. Outside the gate they had this little village, and they had an ice skating rink! We did some maneuvers there, but not much because Dole Pineapple owned the property there, and one time we destroyed some of their fields.

I: When did you find out that you were shipping out?

M: You are not told anything except to get aboard ship, then after a day or two at sea you are told where you are going. They break out the maps, and try to familiarize yourself to where you will be. When you are on ship, it seems like you are never going to get to where you are going. The ships are zig-zagging, there is naval protection, subs, for entertainment there is nothing to do but read. Like a fool, I got on the bow of the ship and watched these little flying fish playing in the bow wake, jumping out of the water. At night, you could sleep on deck for the fresh air, most everyone did. I lost my foot locker at sea when the rope line between ships broke, all my stuff went to the bottom. I think later on I got a check for 50 bucks. Getting back to Saipan, the water off Saipan was deep, and I saw a Jap aviator floating, and he was looking at us in anger, I was thinking about shooting him. The bombardment, you could hear it, it must have been day two of the operation. HM Smith, Howlin' Smith, he was in charge of this operation. Our general went over to his ship, to get orders, and the first words out of Howlin' Smith's mouth are 'What the hell are you doing here?' Can you imagine that? Not a good start. We got a map, the southern part was mountainous, with caves, and the northern part had the sea shores. O'Brien, I think A company was the first to get ashore, and he is looking for our equipment, weapons, ammunition, and so on, and no one knew where they were. And the marines had gone in on an easy grade beach, and our LVTs got hung up on some rocks, we had to wade in. O'Brien, he had to be the first one in, he tried to fight, then moved to the left, looking for ammunitions. We found a cave,

right on the water's edge. All the natives who had leprosy were confined there. That was an amazing thing to look at.

In action, I was Mike 3, I was FO for the mortar platoon, I was on the MLR. I had field glasses and a radio operator, and I was climbing trees. There was a navy observer, he was calling to his ships and directing fire, so I asked him how he did it. I was using a compass and calling coordinates. He said he used a base point. One of the factories had a big chimney, the ships can see it, he takes a declination from it. So I tried it and it worked out pretty good. I paid for that later. Between the rain, humid weather, you lived in a poncho. That was your hotel, and a couple of C rations. You got pretty scuzzy, you could not get out and get clean. These enemy were in trees, caves, in the ground. There was a lull in the fighting, someone relieved us, and so I finally get into the sunshine, and there is a body of a dead marine there, maggots all over him, and I go on eating, did not bother me a bit. That island stunk. And the flies were thick, you had to eat under your poncho to get away.

I: Were you involved in the fighting at the airfield?

M: No. The 106th was singing a song. They were singing the Marine Corps Hymn. And it went this way:

From the shores of Eniwetok, to the slopes of Tapotchau,  
We have fought our country's battles, and we fight again right now.  
Oh, the Army, Navy, Air Corps, all were present at these scenes,  
But the guys who got the credit were, .....

And I will never forget that song.  
There was one hellacious explosion, the ground rocked. And you could see the cloud, like the atomic bomb! What the hell was that!?! They blew up an ammunition dump. There was a cannon up on the cliff, there was tracks into a cave, and camouflage, and the air force came in, and they might have got a hit, but finally the navy got it, and this stuff flew out! You had infiltrators at night. And the parachute flare would go up, and you looked for them crawling on the ground.

I: What was the terrain like?

M: Thick brush, cane fields, you were trying to stay out of the open areas. If you gained a lot of ground during the day, you were told to retreat at night, back to your foxhole, sort of overlapping. And that is what the marines hated. We were cowards. There were two different tactics. When the army moves forward, we clean out any pockets of resistance before we continue. The marine corps bypasses the pockets. This group put up sleeping nets and bunked down. They could not go with their group to get their rest, because when the banzai happened they were caught with their pants down!

I was called back to regimental headquarters. I grabbed a jeep to get some ammo. I did not know the password at headquarters. When I was challenged, I said 'Where is the ammo dump!' I came across Captain John C. Baker, and he had a huge foxhole, he was hiding in it, so I got ammo and left. I went back out on July 6, with my radio operator. There was a row of trees at the edge of the cliff, we went there and climbed trees. I had a .45 and a carbine. I could see the gooks moving back and forth, I did not realize they were preparing for the banzai. I sent out smoke, and using my base point, I gave them declination and told them to fire for effect. You should have seen those bastards run! As they run away, I direct the fire to follow them. I felt good about that. The following morning was the banzai. When I first took position, there were several targets, a field piece, I think they credited me with knocking that out, this was on the 6th, we got a couple

shrapnel wounds, I worked the radio, and the map, and I heard a rustling, they are coming for me, two of them, I got one in the head and one in the torso, then I moved to a night position. The following morning I heard all this yipping, a bunch of women ahead of them, bottle-washers, cooks, sticks in the air, waves of them, I had a field day as far as shooting but I ran out of ammo, I was not far from them, 50 yards, that went on all day, I was coward, I tried to stay hidden, kept shooting, I knocked off a couple, I did my share, I am satisfied.

I went back, there was a guy draped over a machine gun, he looked familiar, I went back to my company, the battle was not over, the island was technically declared secured, but it was not. July 7, that was the big rush, that did not end it by any means.

I: Did you see Baker?

M: I was on my out of there, I would not have recognized him. The guy draped over the machine gun, him I knew. I was told to take a platoon, and clear that area, we went through caves for 3 or 4 days, you threw in a grenade, then fire some shots in, some had civilians in it. One cave was huge, with stacks of straw, food, liquid, balsa wood, we were told the food might be poisoned, so we found some sardines, beans and tomatoes, and that stuff put Campbell's to shame! We pigged out on that! We found rice wine, Sake, we got drunk so I do not remember much. We were on a farm field, on a plateau, we heard noises, staying in the shadows, near a creek, 50 feet or more, women and men, washing clothes, huts, shelters, we followed a trail, sneaking around, to fire a shot and get them all, we rounded them up, and took them to headquarters, and they told us there was no room for them, to just shoot them, so went out to the cliff, and shot them, and it was not right. We had a truck, rounding up prisoners, and women would throw grenades, that is what we faced.

I: You mentioned a guy on a machine gun?

M: I did not know that until we got down to the New Hebrides. Espiritu Santo, where Frank Buck got the biggest snake in the world, huge snails, and stinking jungle. We are couple hundred yards from the shoreline, and at night, you hear a jeep running over crabs and making a popping sound, and coconut crabs, lived in the trees, huge pincers, delicious meat. One guy had a bone through his nose, he led us to the mission house. There was a guy in our company and his dad was a shipwright. He bartered war souvenirs to the navy ships for tools. He built a beautiful sailboat. The colonel, bird colonel, assigned as our regimental commander, there were not many officers left, he called together the mortar platoon leaders and gave us a problem, he wanted to test our experience and knowledge, we started through the jungle and sat down. After Saipan, we were not going to push this hard, we sat down. We got back early, and I got a call from Colonel Walter G. Wynn, he was fresh from the states, tie and polished shoes. He confined me to quarters, I had to be the mail censor. Then we were called cowards by one of these reporters. I wrote a letter to the Troy Record. And it went through. And I was talking about the guy on the machine gun. I did not know who it was ! (emotional), if anyone should get the presidential medal, he should! He was a captain, assigned to the medical detachment as the dentist. When I came back to the area, he was draped over the gun, bodies stacked two high around him. Eddy Beaudoin had come back from being with O'Brien, with friend and foe mixed, there is not much you can do. He was carrying a wounded man, a Jap beheaded the wounded man and hit part of Ed's head too. This guy's name was Solomon, and he got everyone out, picked up a rifle and started shooting, then the machine gunner got killed, so he took it and moved it several times because of all the bodies piling up. That is the letter I sent to the Troy Record. This soldier had

bodies piled up, he had 30 or 45 bullets in his body, he deserves the Medal of Honor. As far as I know he has not even got an infantry badge, he has nothing. It's in the book that Captain Love wrote, I saw a letter the father had wrote to Love, it was in The Gallivanter, it was a thank you letter from the father, because Love had wrote to the father, telling the story of his son. People in congress have been asked to help get the medal.

After my confinement ended, the CO wanted to see me, I had to write the letters to the next of kin, I got promoted to first lieutenant.

I: After Espiritu Santo, where did the unit go?

M: Our next place was Okinawa, to me it was a cakewalk, I was able to get some rest. They had everything zeroed in, it was tough. They had a cemetery, on a slope, there was a horse that followed me around after I fed it corn. Remember I said Ferns did not like me. I stayed with the platoon, he ordered us to set up on a ridge as ordered. I MLR was on the top of the ridge! The japs saw our every move on Okinawa. I went through some coral ridges or pinnacles, trees, and I came around to an area like a football field, a good spot, and I bring the guns up. All of a sudden, KABOOM! I flew 15 feet, but I did not get hurt. I got on the phone, and the CO was killed. Another time, after we cleared out the caves, we moved to the beaches, to get on the ships, I got my platoon to the beach, go take a swim, beautiful sight, here comes a landing craft, right on us, these guys jump out with cameras, order us away so they can take action movies of clean shaven marines landing, pictures for moral support.

I: Ralph Smith gets relieved at Saipan?

M: Smith got relieved, our division got our notoriety. General Griner took over, don't know much about him. There are not many men left now.

I: Did you know Sergeant Baker?

M: Certainly, Baker and O'Brien. He was screw up, private, sergeant, got busted, a damn good man! Yep. O'Brien was like a banty rooster. He was the kind of guy who would go out and do it himself before he would tell you to do it, yes.

I: After Okinawa?

W: After Okinawa, I went to Japan, got orders for home, I don't remember, a blank, had enough points, to Fort Dix, got my papers, worked construction, got into the national Guard, Troy Armory, truck company, got my railroad tracks, (captains bars), O'Hara was the boss, battalion commander hated me, I walked out, got a notice a year later that I had been discharged. Before I left Troy, with the same men, they stayed in Japan, then got sent to Washington state and VA hospitals. I was told to put on my uniform and go to the 15 St. Armory, and I accepted the regimental colors when they were returned, the unit did not bring them back in a ceremony or official manner. That ended my career! All my friends I served with got me to join the Purple Heart, the VA, etc. now I am a life member of many organizations.

I: Thank you for the interview.

Transcribed by Ben Stoline March 31, 2015