

**Vincent R. Clemente
Veteran**

**Interviewed on May 20th 2007 at
Rome Free Academy, Rome NY**

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

VC: I was drafted, I was still in high school. I was old for that time, I was eligible and had all my requirements. Drafted in February of 1943.

Q: Where were, you living when you were drafted?

VC: I was living in Utica NY, was immediately sent to fort Dicks then transported to North Carolina and was very surprised we volunteered for the glider unit. As you enter the service at fort dicks they ask you if you want to be a paratrooper and of course I did not volunteer and not knowing I would be in the air born unit. The glider men were not paid a supplement like the paratroopers were. It was kind of sad in some ways because we did lose quite a few men in training and eventually of course congress did pass a law that all the glider personnel would get the flight pay the paratroopers were getting but by that time I had already volunteered to the upper to without moving from the unit so that was very nice.

Q: Do you remember your first days of training and what were those like?

VC: Well it was a little difficult we were not kept McCall which is part of fort Bragg now in North Carolina it was normal at the beginning normal infantry training and as it progressed of course we got into the glider training and that was a little more difficult not in itself but we had many accidents, gliders would crash we would lose some people. I was in two accidents they're very fragile pieces of equipment and it was very difficult to land, I mean you had no wheels they had skids and you have to find a good safe place and you could imagine what would happen in a situation in Europe where they did land without knowing where they were landing so it was a fairly hazardous situation.

Q: Do you remember any of your instructors?

VC: Well we had our instructors who were basically our own men, our own lieutenants and our own sergeants who had come from other units there were very professional soldiers and they were considerate but we went through a long training period it took us a year basically to do it everything knew we had to do. Basic training, glider training, maneuvers and certain Louisiana and then parachute training in New Guinea so all in all it took a while.

Q: Where was your first stop in the Pacific? Where were you first sent to?

VC: In the pacific area, left San Francisco and took a slow boat to New Guinea

when these Liberty Ships took at least five or six weeks. They did it very cautiously and very slowly. We went to New Guinea for further training and preparing for an invasion of the Philippines so that was the first place we stopped at ... in the Philippines there was a southern New Guinea which was called Papua New Guinea at that time.

Q: Did you have to adjust to the climate when you got there?

VC: In a way what we had to adjust to other things so we were given pills for a mosquito for malaria and ...

Q: Is that a big problem down there?

VC: It was a problem but we didn't notice any cases of malaria outright but I wouldn't have known but we were kind of given pills every day and they made sure we took the pills it was many men were concerned because they turn yellow basically the guy told concern fighter. Physically I don't think it mattered much but it did the occurrence was a little shocking for some people, you literally turn yellow.

Q: Do you remember the day of your first operation in the Pacific?

VC: The first operation was right after the invasion of late a and the north and I'm not quite sure and we came in from the south. The whole purpose was when they drove all the Japanese soldiers into the mountains, our job was to go up into the mountains after the stragglers and basically that was our job to kind of find those people that were left and it was probably, um I'm not sure of the date of the invasion.

Q: This was your first combat experience?

VC: yes, this was the first combat experience in the mountains of Leyte and was very difficult in other ways not just because of the battle but it was a rainy season and we were caught in the monsoon season up in the mountains and literally weeks and weeks of rain that you could not change your clothes or anything of that nature and they sure no was very distressing. It was very strange that just about the end of the battle of Christmas, you know I can give you a rough idea of 1944. We were on our way down the mountain and the sun came out for the first time and it was Christmas Day, it was very interesting situation.

Q: How did you stay in touch with your family?

VC: Well we had what they called email be letters and it was an all in one letter that the envelop and the letter he would write on and then you would seal it and send it out and we could write as often as we wished but we didn't know when it got out or how long it took but that was basically the only way. And every letter was censored so you had to be careful what you wrote and how you wrote it.

Q: Were there plenty of supplies on your operation? Ever a shortage?

VC: while we were climbing the mountains, we had no resupply, once we got on top of the mountain they should drop by parachute, supplies and being that it was so difficult and the weather wasn't proper it was hard in some situations but we seem to manage. We had our rations, we had no regular meals and we seemed to survive that situation.

Q: You said you trained for the invasion of the Philippines?

VC: Well we didn't know exactly where but we trained as soldiers all situations you know infantry, maneuvers, and things of that nature.

Q: Do you remember where the fiercest fighting you witnessed was?

VC: The most fierce float would be in Luzon then we after late a we took LSI's and landing ship southern Luzon and the same situation took place there or the original invasion was north of Manila. We were sent to the south and as they push people down and out we would go into the hills and mountains and search people and that's basically what our mission was, to find people that were stragglers and things of that nature.

Q: What were the Japanese like? Would they surrender or fight to the death?

VC: Well we seldom took prisoners which was too bad in some ways and there was part of their philosophy and training they did fight great to the end. Especially one situation I was not involved with when we captured Manila, we were in the south of Manila and our mission was to take Nichols Field and where we lost quite a few men. When we retreated back into the mountains we had to find the Japanese and when I got wounded it was a situation where the Japanese were collecting at Mount Maculot which was a mountain where apparently they were all told to meet, some water and on our way to that place we saw some Japanese at night and we started firing on those people and consequently I got wounded that night and I was sent back to New Guinea. The biggest battle of our unit was to come at that mountain which was the last foothold for the Japanese in that sector so that was quite a battle and that was the last big battle because they went back to southern Luzon for rest camp and then by the time I got back to my unit from New Guinea from the hospital, the war was beginning to end. The bombs were dropped and that was basically the end for us. We were gonna be the first unit to jump into Japan for the invasion consequently as we were designated as the first unit to go in, we were sent to Japan as the first peacetime soldiers. We were the first ones in Japan by air and then the first cavalry came in by sea. Many of our men were honor guards for General MacArthur and we flew in with airplanes and he was on one of the ships that we arrived in Yokohama.

Q: How did people entertain themselves while on duty? What did you do in your spare time?

VC: Well what can you do? Kind of just huddle around and you watch what you have to do. You're on guard mostly and you talk with each other and get friendly with those you were not friendly with.

Q: Did you make a lot of close friends?

VC: Oh very much so I said people had told you about earlier who had just died we're very good friends and I still have these friends for the most part because we were very strong unit, we still write to each other and we meet once a year and reunions as a company and I would say there's about 20 of us that are very close and still communicate with each other basically through the newsletter that I write and I try to keep them all together, for the most part many of them are dead but I still communicate with their relatives, with their sons, daughters or grandchildren so it's been a very rewarding situation.

Q: Now when you got wounded was that the last day of your service?

VC: No, I got wounded and went to New Guinea to a hospital it was a surface wound in my hand and I was reactivated and went back to the Philippines to rejoin my unit.

Q: When was the last day of your service? You recall that day?

VC: It was in January of 1946, Fort Dix New Jersey, it was very strange walking along one of the streets at Fort Dix I recognized my cousin who had been in the European theater and the first time I had seen him in three years. It was very rewarding he is very close to me.

Q: Did you go back to school after the service?

VC: Yes, I decided immediately that I should take advantage of the GI bill of rights. I probably would not have gone back to college financially. At that time, I was never thinking of it and when I was in high school I didn't know what I would be doing. I was especially interested in art so I pursued that situation. I went to what used to be the beginnings of MVCC for a year, it had a different name. Then I transferred to Buffalo College to get my degree in art education and then I went on to get my masters at the University of Wisconsin. I then taught art and I eventually ended up as a potter at Procter institute where I started the pottery department.

Q: Would you mind telling us about some of these pictures?

VC: This was in New Guinea and the tents were on an old air field in the pacific and maybe else where the air force would put down these prefabricated mats, they had holes in them and they would hook them together and that would be their landing field and our tents were basically on those mats. Next to us was the airfield that we would use to transport the men up and off.

Q: There's this picture here, mind telling us a bit about that?

VC: That's the same thing, the same place in New Guinea, in the jungle there somewhere. I can't give you specific dates. We were issued little scooters, that's the first and last time I think I have ever saw that. All the air born units had these quick mobile contraptions that they were supposed to issue to everybody, I don't know too much about it, it happened to be around and I took it out somewhere.

Q: Then this picture here is it part of a glider?

VC: Yes, this is very interesting. This is a piece of a glider, a couple years ago I got this package from a daughter of one of our friends and she didn't know what it was and as soon as I opened it up and unfolded it, I realized it was a piece of a glider that had crashed in North Carolina and I looked over I carefully and saw all these names and saw most of the fathers, this is not the whole company but there's quite a few. I'm up in there somewhere and I looked at names here to try and find out who's still living and who was not. That's basically what this is, I have it framed and I have it at home. Eventually, we don't know when or where it will go but we will try to send it to the eleventh air born museum at fort camp bell I think that's where our units at now.

Q: And we have a picture of your medals here, would you mind telling us all these medals at your words?

VC: This is the glider infantry badge, this is a combat infantry badge which you can only receive if you're in actual combat. Parachute infantry badge, of course my ID tags, Bronze star which is not given to me individually but to the whole unit, it's given to the unit. Purple Heart, army of occupation from Japan. I'm not quite sure of this one, ... American campaign medal, that's this one here. The Philippine liberation medal, next one, Asia pacific and good conduct. And what do we have here.... Pacific victory medal and Asiatic Pacific campaign victory medal and basically yeah. This is the shoulder patch of our division, eleventh air born division and of course we either wore this or both, I preferred that because we were qualified in gliders persons.

Q: Did your military experience influence you any way like outside your normal life? Like did you take any of the values that you picked up in the military outside life?

VC: Well I'm not quite sure, I think some of the discipline, very important, the friend ship you made with people I think the respect others shower me I show other people, it was an interesting experience. It certainly gave me the opportunity to go back to school, I have made friends for life, I have gotten certain values I've kept whether they were with me or not at the time I don't know but it certainly makes a big difference in my life.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share we did not ask about?

VC: I was a little surprised when my first sergeant who sometimes you assume that they never realize you are about or around and when he decided and he started the newsletter and it was, he made the decision that he was going to give it up because he was not feeling too well that I should take it over and I was very surprised not knowing that he knew what was even around and those kind of things where you think nobody notices you and you have some value to somebody. So I took the job and hopefully it maintained the same consistency in values he had and the men think I'm doing a pretty good job so I'm very pleased with that.