

Charles H. Appleyard
Narrator

David Sears
Interviewer

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27 Kenwood Circle
Queensbury, New York 12084

DS: My name is David Sears, and I am here with Mr. Charlie Appleyard in the comfort of his cottage. Thank you, it is now January 6, 2011. My first question for you, Mr. Appleyard, is where were you December 7, 1941, on the attack of Pearl Harbor?

CA: We were on the Taconic State Parkway. We lived in Yonkers, and we were going to visit my aunt in Poughkeepsie. We were about halfway to Poughkeepsie and we had the car radio on, and whatever was on announced Pearl Harbor. My father wasn't with us, it was my mother, my grandmother, and my aunt. She pulled over to the side—it was a four-lane highway—and she turned right around, all she wanted to do was get home. My father—he'd gone to the Polo Grounds in New York City to watch the giants play a professional football game—he told me that the man who was with him that day, he was in Yonkers, and he was from Honolulu. Of course, they didn't know what was going on, but once in a while they announced over the PA system. Something dawned on him that some of these calls were for military men. Colonels, whatever.

He found out what happened, and he got, of course, awfully upset. He said "I got to get to a phone, I got to do this and that... Come home to Yonkers, our home, use the phone." I don't remember—it took him hours and hours trying to get a phone call through and he found out his family was fine, but you can imagine how he felt. I digress, go ahead.

DS: What initially got you into the service?

CA: What got me into the service? I was drafted.

DS: You were drafted?

CA: Yes.

DS: You were drafted kind of late because—what were your dates of service?

CA: Early 1945. My birthday was January 30, and not too long after that, I went in. When I got out, it was almost two years, January of 1946. By that time, everything was pretty much over and done with. I was fortunate in that respect. It was a very popular war, as opposed to some of the ones we've had since. Everybody wanted to do something.

DS: So being drafted late, you were part of the war effort at home as well?

CA: Oh, before. Yeah, yeah.

DS: Did you have any friends that immediately enlisted after Pearl Harbor, in Yonkers?

CA: Yeah, but they were older than I was. That was the first thing.

DS: And, I'm sorry, what was your date of birth?

CA: Oh, January 30 1927.

DS: You are currently at the age of?

CA: Eighty-four, almost. Eighty-three.

DS: Happy birthday.

CA: Thank you.

DS: What was your highest rank achieved in the service?

CA: Corporal.

DS: And that's in the army, correct?

CA: Yeah.

DS: What position did you hold?

CA: I ended up in the military police, as an M.P.. I had thought at one time, what if my grandkids asked me "What did you do in the big war?" and I said, "I fought American soldiers." Fortunately, it never came to that. Most of the guys were pretty good. You know, we'd run into problems, but it was just something that happened. I wasn't trained to be an M.P..

DS: I digress back to the war effort at home. Did you take part in gathering scrap metal.

CA: Yeah.

DS: Can you describe any specific things that you did?

CA: Well, you mentioned it. Going around the neighborhood, taking whatever you could get ahold of. And paper, we bundled up newspapers. I was a junior air raid warden, whatever that was. We just practiced, nothing ever really happened, but we had air raid drills. We'd go around, make sure no light was showing, there wasn't much to it really. That was just what you did.

DS: How did rationing affect your home life?

CA: It wasn't terrible. It affected it, certainly, everything was rationed. I remember, my mother patronized an independent butcher. There aren't any independent butchers anymore, I don't think... well maybe in Hudson Falls, come to think of it... But anyway he was very good. She had been a customer for a long time, so we were more apt to get a good piece of meat for the same points. It wasn't terrible, we didn't starve. Well, they even rationed shoes, you know, they rationed clothing. Everything was rationed. It was sort of humorous in a way, to make sure that the most cloth was used on the best places. The O.P.A., which is the office of price administration, said "ladies first." Girls wore skirts back then, the skirts could come to the knee. Everybody wore the same length skirt! You couldn't have cuffs on your pants. I guess you can get cuffs on your pants these days, but back then no, no more cuffs. So, everything was rationed. But it wasn't a hardship. There was also a black market, which we knew nothing about, but it existed.

DS: Back to your military service, where did you end up serving your term?

CA: Oh well, we went to the basic training and-actually, I digress a bit again-1940 or 1941, Great Britain was in really big trouble, with all the U-boat sinking. So Churchill and Roosevelt made a deal. In fact, there were a whole bunch of World War I destroyers anchored in the Hudson River, North of Tappan Zee. So we gave the English fifty World War I destroyers, and in return, we got a string of bases. Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, down to the West Indies, Trinidad, and on the main land of South America, British Guiana. And I digress because that's where I ended up. And British Guiana, I never even knew what it was. I had not realized that this was part of Guyana. And we ended up going to British Guiana asking where we were going. And that's where it was. It was on the Northeast shoulder of South America, not too far from Trinidad, next to Venezuela. I was there just about a year.

DS: Did you have any friends that you kept in contact with during the war?

CA: Yeah, up until a couple years ago, the fellow I was with, remarkably enough all through service, died a couple years ago, up in St. Regis Falls, near Yonkers. It was odd because they just were replacing people when needed. And we met in basic training, and for some reason or another, we stayed together. All the way through. And we got out around the same time.

DS: It's good to have a buddy.

CA: Oh, yeah. I made a lot of friends, but he was really the only one I kept in touch with all this time. You can go ahead with your questions.

DS: How did your family feel about you being in the service, even though it was late in the war?

CA: I graduated high school when I was seventeen, so I had six months, and I wanted to enlist. Of course, you had to have your parent's permission to enlist and they didn't want to do it. Mainly, because after D-Day, my father felt optimistic about me. I graduated from high school the same month as D-Day, and he said, "you might escape all this," and I said, "yeah, maybe."

Of course, it didn't work out, but I didn't see any action either. Which is fine. My mother was more upset than my father was. But, everybody did something.

DS: Your friends who had served, did you keep in contact with them while you were gone?

CA: Oh, yeah. You mean friends at home?

DS: Friends overseas.

CA: Yeah, just very few for a while. We got scattered in time. I moved up here, and somebody else moved there, and the only one I kept in touch with for a great length of time was Bernie Bailey from St. Regis Falls. Of course by that time, the war was over, we were just replacing people who had been sitting in South America. At one time, it was an important spot, early in the war. It was mainly replacements, and we got scattered around very much.

DS: What would you say would be the highlight of your service?

CA: Well, the only reason you're here and I'm here is I happened to meet General Eisenhower. DS: A great honor.

CA: Well, I tell you about that because, I mentioned before that British Guiana was the end of the Northeastern shore of South America. Tropical climate, and hot, terrible cool off at night. It was thirty-five miles from the capital, and there was a big, about a mile-wide river that came to the capital and the sea-port. And this was about the first high point, and that's where they built this air base. It was in a tropical climate, and they would get on it. It would get hot, up to ninety or maybe a little bit more, and then it would rain, and rain. I'd never seen it rain so hard before. And the temperature would go from about ninety or ninety-two down to about seventy-eight.

And the rain would stop, it might be a half-hour, an hour, and the sun would come out and this would start all over again. Sometimes it rained at night. And that was the climate, it was hot and humid. The war was over, and Eisenhower was on his way back from Europe, and I think he was on his way to becoming Chief of Staff. Coming back from Europe, he thought it would be a good idea to-he visited many of the places that had supported the war in Europe. He went to Africa, he went to a place in Brazil. Why, I don't know, he stopped in British Guiana. So, because it was hot we turned up our sleeves one notch, never wore leggings, never wore ties when we were on duty... There were only two hundred people in the whole base, and the Lieutenant Colonel said, "boy, we've got to make a showing." I think he wanted to make full Colonel, I'm not sure. So, he wanted an honor guard, and Eisenhower was going to stay overnight. All the buildings there were one story above ground, in other words, you always had to climb stairs because it was so humid. That just gave you some circulation of air, kept all the critters away. Somebody in the warehouse found a bottle-well, more than one bottle, a case, of griffin allwite. Griffin allwite used to be a very big seller, used on saddle shoes. Saddle shoes were either brown or white, two-toned shoes with a rubber sole.

Very, very popular back then. Anyway, everybody-the girls especially-had to keep the white, so they'd put it on. As a matter of fact, it's about the same consistency of this stuff [picks up bottle]. So, they got cartridge belts out, they got leggings that came up to here [gestures], leather Sam Brown belts from shoulder to shoulder, and held a pistol.

Anyway, we spent all this time making it all white. Which did not turn out to be a very smart move, because we all got out to the airport and the lieutenant in charge of the platoon said I was going to be the first one to guard Eisenhower. So about thirty minutes before the plane was going to land, it rained! We never wore raincoats, because the only raincoats were thick, heavy-like oil. And if you put one of those on, in five minutes you were wetter inside from sweat than if you were outside in the rain. Anyway, we weren't in the sharpest looking outfits in the world, but we went through our bases. And we went over to inspect, climbed on down, and there was a road and then a driveway. And what I was supposed to do-here I had a .5 caliber pistol, but I also had one rifle. So, I was supposed to patrol with the rifle, not slung, held. Back and forth, back and forth, past the driveway. So, he came, and I snapped to attention. Course, he had a driver, car went all the way down, that was fine. So, I was walking back and forth. And you know what's gonna happen. It's gonna rain. And, it rained. So there I am, back and forth, soaking wet, the griffin allwhite is running down the pants down the shirt [laughs]. But what are you gonna do? Along with his party was his naval attaché. So, the rain stopped and he came out [makes hand gesture], "yes sir," I think he was a commander, I'm not sure. But anyway, he said "the General sends his compliments, and says "he wanted me to inform you that when it rains, it's not necessary to stand out here. You take shelter under the carport." Of course, the car would drive underneath the house, you know. I said, "oh, okay, fine. Thank you very much." I went back, and it rained again. So I went down, stood under the carport. A little messier than before, but I was standing there. Our colonel came along, well, he wanted to know what the hell I'm doing under there. I'm supposed to be out [points] walking back and forth. I very nicely explained to him what had happened. He said "you're not in the damn navy, you're in blankety blank army. You get back out." So, back I went. A little while later, he came out and he apologized to me.

Because, apparently in the conversation, you know, he found out yes, I had really been informed I didn't have to stand out there in the rain. So I said "thank you very much." So I went back, and the rain [hand gesture], and I'm in the carport. And they were going up to the mess hall for dinner. So, a couple men came down and General Eisenhower comes down the stairs. Boy, I don't look very good but I've got to be at attention no matter what. And he says, "good evening, corporal." I said, "oh my god, there isn't another corporal within a hundred yards of this place! He's talking to me." I was very much impressed, I said "yes sir!" He said, "at ease." He wanted to know my name, where I was from. I was from Yonkers, yes he knew where that was. Was I going to stay in service? I said, "no sir." I didn't intend to. After I got out of high school, I had started college. I intended to go back. He said, "oh, fine, where were you going?" I said, "Columbia." "Very good." He said, "well, whatever, the best of luck to you." In the car he goes, I thought, "oh, well that was very nice." So about another forty-five minutes or an hour went by and I was relieved. And another fellow from the platoon came up to replace me. He's back in about forty-five minutes. "What happened?" Eisenhower got to the phone, he said, "you know, the war's over." He said, "This place is surrounded on three sides by jungle, on the fourth side by a mile wide river. You don't need a guard out there." So, we didn't have any guards. That was my highlight of service. But there's an epilogue as well because three years later, I got out of service, I went back to college, and went back to Columbia. They had to take you back-if you were out of school, they had to take you back-

DS: I don't want to interrupt-

CA: Go ahead.

DS: Did the G.I. Bill actually help?

CA: Oh, sure.

DS: Did it help you pay for college?

CA: Oh, yeah. You bet. Because my father had said, “what are you going to do?” Of course, the first thing you think of is going into service. He said, “well, have you thought about college?” I said I really hadn’t. He said, “well, I can afford to send you to college for a year.” And that’s how I got into college. When I went back, in the meantime, Eisenhower had retired from service. He was named president of Columbia University. So, there were two thousand students, but anyway, anytime he was walking around the campus, he would talk to people. So, one day [laughs], there were four of us walking across the campus, and he comes down the street, this combination campus-street as it was then in Manhattan. But anyway, he comes down the street so we stopped. And he chatted with each one of us. He got to me and I said, “sir, we’ve met before.” He said, “we have? Where?” So I told him. He said, “oh my god, you were the guy who got stuck out in the rain.” He remembered me. I was just [makes hand gestures].

DS: Awestruck?

CA: Yeah. There’s something about that man... Both different times I met him, you know, which was really coincidence, just something about him, it’s hard to put into words. One of the fellows amongst the four that met in Columbia, he had been in Patton’s Third Army and they got to some crossroads, and a small rear-guard of Germans wanted to hold them up. And there was a little firefight, and he’s diving for cover and gets hit right in the fanny. So, he was fine, of course he recovered. That’s a whole other story, but anyway, he happened to mention that. He said, “where were you?” One friend of mine was on the Pacific. “Oh, well, I don’t know much about that.” I’m thinking, “yeah, sure,” but anyway, my friend who was wounded in France mentioned this little town. He said, “oh, yeah. You remember George Patton? He was really mad, that held him up about twelve hours.” You know, he remembered little things like that. He knew right where my friend had been, where he got wounded. And, I say, there’s something about the man. It’s hard to explain. Of course, that’s my view, have you seen pictures of that grin?

DS: Oh, yeah.

CA: So really, that was my whole story about World War II. Really, there were an awful lot of people that did an awful lot more than I did. I understood too, later on, that I can’t remember whether went from British Guiana to Trinidad to Panama, but anyway he went in that general direction before he got home. Supposedly, according to our officer, he had radioed that he didn’t need all these honor guards. The only thing I ever saved was my M.P. band. I think about it now, I must have been an officer. I know I felt myself I was a sad-looking mess, with griffin allwite all over me. But that was the war. So that was about it.

DS: Tragically, President Roosevelt had died before he got to see the end of the war. How did you feel when FDR died?

CA: He was the only president I ever knew. Because, you don’t remember much before you were five years old. He was the only president I knew. At first, you know [makes shocked face]. I was in basic training. All of a sudden I felt very smart because there were other guys there that really didn’t know what’s gonna happen now. At least I knew the next thing that was gonna happen was the vice-president takes over. Course, I had to stop and think, “who was the vice-president?” But some of these other fellas, they didn’t know. Fellas from West Virginia, Kentucky... I don’t mean to put them all into the same category, but I remember there were a couple guys from West Virginia-they didn’t know what was gonna happen. They felt worse than I did, or more lost. That was my feeling.

DS: President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb against Japan. How do you feel about that?

CA: Great. Great. I thought it was wonderful. Because we were always training. Training, training, training, we were training to invade Japan. May was V-E Day. I was in service. We were going to invade Japan. And they were talking about a million casualties, dead or wounded. We were gonna have two or three different invasions of Japan. On different islands. I never questioned it. Since then, from what I’ve read and seen, there’s been a lot of-not a lot, but some criticism-and rightly so, about the casualties and results. But at the time, I thought it was great because that was it. The war was over. So, I

think it was the right thing to do.

DS: Do you have any funny experiences in your time in Guiana?

CA: Any what?

DS: Any funny experiences? In Guiana? Any camaraderie? "Hell-raising" with your buddies? CA: Oh, [shakes head] not too much. Especially if you're M.P., you're supposed to DS: You're supposed to keep everybody in order.

CA: Right. Like I said before, fortunately, we had very little trouble. Some guys would get drunk, and you'd have to take care of them. Take them back to their quarters, have them sleep it off or something. We didn't have any real trouble. The only time we came close was when a ship anchored-Georgetown was at the mouth of the Demerara River, that was the capital, and there were sand bars, and there was a tremendous tide there. You know, the tidal water would go up and down the river. So, the ships had come off times depending on the tide. They'd anchor out there until the tide changed. Up the river, these sand bars-or silt bars, I guess-were constantly changing because there was a pretty heavy flow down. And so ships would anchor, everybody'd get off. This one ship came in, the whole crew was Asian. And, gee, I don't think any of them had ever-they were civilians-I don't think any of them had ever had rum before. That was the cheap thing to do, drink to have. They started to get into a tussle with the G.I.s, some of the few

British people that were there. We just broke it up. They never came to a fight, they were too drunk [laughs]. So that's as close as anyone-it was funny, because the price of a bottle of coca-cola down there used to be a nickel. It was twelve cents in their money. So a rum coke, a shot of rum in coke, was eighteen cents. So the Coca-Cola was much more expensive than the rum, rather than the other way around. And they made most, if not all, of the rum for the British navy. That's still tradition for the British navy, to get a serving of rum every day. And British Guiana, at the time, supplied the dark, heavy stuff. If you ever see Demerara rum-there's some around-it's a very dark, heavy, strong rum. And they made that there. That was sort of a light-hearted experience. We just didn't "raise hell" so to speak. We didn't do that. You got into trouble if you did. Oh yeah, one guy did. One guy did.

DS: Do you find it hard watching any sort of documentaries, movies, anything about the war? CA: Yeah. Last year, HBO had a series "The Pacific."

DS: Yes, actually, Mr. [unintelligible] showed us that series in class.

CA: There were parts I didn't like. It was kind of tough. And my neighbors up here in the big house [points] went through most of it.

DS: Actually, can I get his name for reference?

CA: Tom Jones.

DS: Do you think he would be able to-in the future, possibly share his experiences?

CA: Maybe, maybe. He's-yeah, I think he would, because he's done it before.

DS: Oh, okay.

CA: Some of the episodes were a little tough. I never saw any of that stuff, you know, I never saw any combat, I was very fortunate. And it bothered my wife too, so we didn't go through the whole series. But you did it?

DS: We didn't go through the entire series, but we saw the invasion of Peleliu.

CA: Yup, yup. Well, this fellow Thomas is quite a guy, he'll talk about-he's done a couple things for the [unintelligible], I'm sure. Because I know he did up here one day, and I think he did something with the students. It was one of those things, you know, I thought about it afterwards, and I wouldn't have missed it

for a million dollars and I wouldn't do it again for two million. It's a big interruption in your life. [Sees cat or dog] Well, hi Jerry, how you doing? It must be nighttime or he's hungry, one of the two.

DS: I would ask you why you believe young people should not regard World War II as ancient history and how relevant it is and how important it is that we learn this.

CA: That can be a deep question. I think, for all of us of that age, whether we were in service, or-not all that many females were in service... And I think that for this country it was a [unintelligible], in that before World War II, we were pretty much isolationist. We didn't want to get close to the people, did not want to get involved. We certainly knew there was a war going on, obviously it had been going on for a couple years, but we didn't have a bad time in World War I. We sent a whole thing of our troops over to France and suffered a lot of casualties.

What for? Twenty years later, the same thing, but after we were attacked, then it all changed. It all changed. Our country had been attacked, not unlike 9/11, we were attacked. By golly, we all had to pitch in and do what we could do. Then, we became the leader in the world, no more isolation or being by ourselves. It became obvious, especially after the atomic bomb, that we didn't have these big oceans to protect us. They weren't as much protection as they had been. I think it affected the post-war period too, because you asked people about rations. Short of just. Everything was rationed, then you had to be-boom, after the war, back to peacetime production and everybody [unintelligible]. You asked about the G.I. Bill, which was a lifesaver for many people. That was another part, an awful lot of people got a good education or accomplished a lot of things that maybe they wouldn't have if they hadn't had the opportunity to go to college. College was cheap. When I went back from service, they weren't supposed to increase tuition, but they did. It was five hundred dollars a year.

DS: That's incredible.

CA: Now, that didn't include-I mean, I commuted, I didn't live on campus. And I didn't get any food. That was just tuition.

DS: I would love to have five hundred dollars for tuition [laughs].

CA: So, yeah, I think that. That's sixty-something years ago, wasn't it? Be like ancient history wouldn't it?

DS: To some kids, yes.

CA: But, I think it changed attitudes on life, as much as anything else.

DS: My thoughts are a bit scatterbrained but I want to ask you a couple things about post-war. CA: Sure.

DS: You mentioned you finished college back at Columbia when you returned. What did you end up doing after you graduated, job-wise?

CA: I lived in Yonkers, and at that time, the world's largest carpet factory was in Yonkers. Thousands of people worked there. My father worked for them in sales and marketing. I was there for a while, then-this is a long story-they got into trouble with the textile workers' union. I decided that I didn't like the looks of things, and I left. In the meantime, Janet's family came from Glens Falls. Her father was a doctor, he practiced in Yonkers. We met in Yonkers, then her father passed away, and her uncle had passed away. They wanted to know if we would be interested in coming to Glens Falls. So I moved the business here to Glens Falls. So that's how we ended up here. So, I think college should help you how to think.

DS: So, what did you end up doing here, in Glens Falls.

CA: Well, we owned the company, really, the majority. So I was president.

DS: J.W.?

CA: Janet was the corporate secretary. That was not a full-time job, but anyway. Then we retired.

DS: Have you attended any war reunions, anything of that nature? Do you belong to a veterans' association, anything like that?

CA: No, no.

DS: I guess this will conclude our interview.

CA: Oh, alright. I don't know if I really helped you understand that period of time, because really, I certainly didn't do anything to contribute to the war. But for me, that was really it. I have, at times, wanted to go back and see how they were doing back there. Now it's an independent country, and it's spelled "Guyana" for whatever reason. I bet that would be interesting, because there's been a few changes. At the time, it was a third world country. It was a British colony, they had little or no representation. So it's certainly different, certainly different. There were an awful lot of people that did an awful lot. I think most of your questions hit the high points.

DS: All right, this is the conclusion of our interview. I'm David Sears, here with Charlie Appleyard. This is it.

CA: Okay.