

**Lewis Buck
Veteran**

**Mike Russett
Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on July 6th, 2006
1070 Madison Avenue
Troy, New York
With comments by Agnes “Betty” Buck**

Legend

Lewis Buck: LB

Mike Russett: MR

Wayne Clark: WC

Agnes Buck: AB

MR: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

LB: Lewis Buck, L-E-W-I-S B-U-C-K.

MR: Where and when were you born?

LB: 6/8/1923 in Clinton, New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

LB: I finished three years of high school, then went in the service.

MR: Were you employed at all before you went in the service?

LB: Yes, I was employed as a mechanic's helper.

MR: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LB: No I don't...that one I don't quite remember.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

LB: I enlisted.

MR: You enlisted in the Marine Corps. Why did you pick the Marine Corps?

LB: I thought that was the best one to go in.

MR: You said your brothers all went in also?

LB: Yes, all my brothers went in.

MR: How many brothers did you have?

LB: We had four. Four went in. And one went in the army.

MR: Where were you inducted?

LB: Syracuse, NY.

MR: Where did you go for basic training?

LB: Green Island.

MR: How long was your basic?

LB: We went to Green Island then we went to Paris Island. We were there about 6 months.

WC: What was basic training like?

LB: It was a new life altogether. It was an experience. It was a lot of regimentation and that, but it was good.

MR: Was this the first time you were away from home?

LB: No, no, I was away from home after my father died.

MR: Where were you assigned after you left Paris Island?

LB: 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines.

MR: Where was that?

LB: New River, North Carolina.

MR: Where did you go after you got to New River and were assigned to the 1st Marines?

LB: We went to San Diego, then we shipped right out to New Zealand.

MR: When you trained, did you train on the M1 [M1 Garand semi-automatic rifle] or the '03 [Springfield M1903 bolt action rifle]?

LB: The '03.

MR: When did you receive your M1s?

LB: After Guadalcanal.

MR: You had '03s on Guadalcanal?

LB: Oh yes! I think that was the last battle where they used the '03.

MR: How long were you in New Zealand?

LB: Probably a week or two. We refitted in New Zealand, and then we went from there

to Guadalcanal.

MR: Were you in the first wave?

LB: Yes.

MR: What was it like?

LB: A cake walk. Believe it or not! We went in and there was no resistance.

MR: How long were you there before they started...?

LB: We were there a month or two before they hit us on the Tenaru. Our battalion was stationed on the Tenaru.

MR: When you went ashore you had the old Higgins Boats, where you went over the side?

LB: Yes.

MR: What happened when the Japanese attacked you along the Tenaru?

LB: They hit about one o'clock in the morning. What happened was our ship with all of our equipment went down. The *George F Elliott*. That got sunk. All we had on us was just what we had. Our rifle and equipment. That's all we had.

MR: Some of the Marines referred to it as Starvation Island. Did you have a lot of trouble with food and supplies?

LB: [Laughs] Yes I guess so! The Navy ran out on us in three days. Well they had to and they pulled out. We were short of supplies, yes.

MR: How did you feel when the Navy left?

LB: You felt like you were marooned. You were just sitting there with all you had on your back. On the Tenaru they only had one strand of barbed wire. That's all we had. It was tough. We were short on everything, short on food, short of supplies. Until we started to get the ships back and bringing the equipment. Then we started to feel a little bit better.

WC: How long did that take to be resupplied?

LB: Oh, there were months. I can remember getting up for breakfast and having Japanese hardtack and tomatoes

WC: So you were eating captured Japanese food?

LB: Yes, the Japanese food, plus the K rations that we had. It was tough. Everybody went down to skin and bones.

MR: Can you describe the battles while you were there? What it was like? The living conditions and so on?

LB: Yes. The Tenaru was a short battle. The Japs, they were crossing the spit and they

hit the barbed wire. They were stacked up two and three deep, right across the whole spit. Of course they ended the battle by flanking them with the 5th [Marine Regiment] They drove the rest of them into the sea. The story there was the commander there, he committed suicide. That was the big battle that we were in.

WC: Did you have a problem with malaria or any tropical disease?

LB: Yes, over there that was rampant. I ended up with Malaria in Australia. I finally caught it.

MR: Were you ever wounded during your time in the service?

LB: Nope. I had my shoulder dislocated. That was when the Japanese Navy came in for a week and shelled use every night, trying to knock out Henderson Field. One of those 18" shells they were shooting fell short. We were in a bunker. Jeez the darn thing caved in on us. We didn't know how long we were in there, and they finally dug us out. But we all survived it. It was just one of those things.

MR: What was your equipment like? How did you feel when you got the Garand over the '03?

LB: [Laughs]. I got the Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun]. That was an improvement!

MR: Did you ever have any operational problems with it? With the humidity and the mud?

LB: No, no. We cleaned them every day. You had to. You had to be careful of the mud wasps getting down there and plugging the barrel up.

MR: How do you think your equipment compared to that of the Japanese?

LB: I think the '03 was better. It was a better rifle and it was accurate.

WC: What did you think of the Japanese as fighters?

LB: They were tough! They were smart, they were tough. They were in the service before we got there. A lot of the guys we were fighting were regular troops. They had years and years of experience. But I wouldn't say they were better than we were!

MR: How would you rate their officers?

LB: They were good, they were good.

MR: How about the men in your unit?

LB: [unclear] 1,053.

MR: What medals or decorations did you ever receive?

LB: I received a meritorious promotion to corporal. Two commendations, one from the Marine Corps, one from the Navy. And the meritorious promotion and good conduct medal

WC: About how much time did you spend overseas, in total?

LB: About two and a half years.

WC: Were there any things that happened to you that stand out that stand out as something emotional or humorous?

LB: Yes, two or three. After the Battle of New Britain, they sent us, our outfit, we were only probably a group of fifty about halfway down the island. We went in every day as a small raiding group, to catch the Japs or see where they were evacuating, and when they were coming down the island. We were sneaking down a trail one day, and there was a log across the trail. We were eyeballing it, we were wondering just whether we should go around the corner, and we thought it was an ambush. All of sudden a Jap jumps up on the log and he starts waving his arms and dancing up the log, and down the log, and up the log, and down the log. I stood there and did like this him [Lewis waved for the man to come toward him]. And he runs down and jumps up and shakes everybody's hands. What he was, was a laborer and he was glad to see us! That you had to laugh. There were funny parts of the war.

The one that really sticks out, I was in combat intelligence and I was the chief scout and observer. I went to eight weeks of schooling in Australia, and we went on a patrol. I had to go out with the natives, I had to learn Pidgin English. I had to go out with the natives because they had to meet us at this river with their canoes. I made the arrangements and we went over. There was only a small group of us, maybe twenty five or thirty men. We got on the canoes and went up the river. We got off in a village, and cut across country to come to another river. We had to cross there. On the way down we killed a couple Japs, we got down to the river we got in the canoes and we crossed. We went on the other side and went up this steep embankment. Well "lo and behold" when we got over there, there were no trails! I had sent the canoes back and we had only kept one canoe.

I asked the natives, and we couldn't go up river because it was all dense jungle, you couldn't go through it because it was all this big swamp, and you couldn't go back to the ocean because you were going right through this big swamp. So we discussed it and we could get in the one canoe and take everybody back on the other side, then from there we'd have to hike all the way back to where we started from and try to get a canoe there. I said to the Lieutenant, "What the heck", I'll get in the canoe, and I'll go down and bring the canoes back. So I got in the canoe, me and the native, and away we went. I said I'll be back in the morning.

We went all the way down the river through the enemy territory, picked up about 10-15 canoes, we all come back the next morning. Got the troops off, took the marines aback out again, we had a landing barge out there and he took us down to our little island. We went up and down three times and we never got shot at!

WC: Were there any USO shows at all over there that you got to see?

LB: On Goodenough Island, I was walking down the road, and who was standing there talking to a guy but Gary Cooper? I went up to him and I was talking to Gary Cooper! Three or four of us were talking to Gary Cooper. He was the only one we ever saw.

He was a tall, lanky guy. Nice guy.

MR: You said you were on Peleliu?

LB: Yes.

MR: What was that like? There you had the amphibious tractors when you went in, correct?

LB: Yes we went in with the amphibious tractors. That was a tough one. When we landed we didn't land on the point. We landed on Beach Red and we took off, right to the airfield. That was our first objective. While we were waiting to cross the airfield, about ten tanks, Japanese tanks came taring down across the airfield and they went right across the front of us! Each one had about ten guys on them, and man they were a shooting gallery! I never heard so much shooting in my life.

A half-track was coming up the road with a seventy-five on it, and he hit the first tank. Of course that blocked them and they spun around and started to go back. Well when he hit that tank with all these people on it...I remember Sgt. Splaine was sitting there in a shell hole, and an arm came flying over and landed in his lap. One guy said to him, "Jeez, I didn't think the man had come over to shake hands with you!"

But when we crossed the airfield, it was just like a scene in World War I when they were charging. This whole division going across that airfield. Taring across it. I ran across this guy, George LeChance, he was a Corporal in my outfit, and he's on his hands and knees. I said "What are you doing down there?!" A shell went off and he got hurt and he blew his partial out, and he was on his hands and knees looking for his partial.

These are funny things that happened. The other one was the guy in front of us was going along and a Japanese artillery shell come in. Now you're not going to believe this. The guy was running. The shell went off underneath him. The guy did a flip and landed on his feet and was still running. Well we got on the other side and we were all looking him over. He said "What are you looking for?" We couldn't believe that he wasn't hurt. It was just something that happened. It was amazing!

MR: Did you have any R&R while you were out in the Pacific?

LB: We didn't have it in New Zealand because we were busy. We went to Australia for eight months. It took that length of time to get the division back in shape again.

MR: Was that after Peleliu? Or after Guadalcanal?

LB: No that was after Guadalcanal. That was the only place we went for R&R after that.

WC: That must have been quite a relief, to be in Australia for eight months.

LB: Oh yes, yes. I remember getting off the ship, and all I was wearing was a Japanese shirt and a Japanese pair of pants. That's all I found to wear. Our stuff was gone with the ship when it went down. The soles of my shoes...I had rawhide tied around my shoes to hold the soles on, the shoes were rotting off my feet.

We must have looked a sorry mess walking down the middle of Melbourne. From the pier, everybody disheveled. Skinny and gaunt! Everybody must have lost about forty-five or fifty lbs. while they were there.

We have pictures of Vandergrift when he was there, and you can see the weight he lost. When they say "Starvation Island", boy that was tough.

Then I woke up in Ford General Hospital. I was out for a week or so with Malaria and I didn't even know it. I went through the whole town and I woke up in the hospital.

WC: Has that bothered you at all?

LB: Oh yes, every once in a while I get the chills and freezes. It comes back once in a while, you feel chilly and cold. I came back with a fungus that I had about eight or nine months? I had a fungus all over my body, I looked like a leopard. I went to an old German doctor and he prescribed a salve for me, we put it on and it did the trick. It took it off.

MR: When did you return from the Pacific?

LB: After Palau. I was down on 8th and I street, Washington DC. I was in the Shangri La for 3 months, the President's retreat. Camp David they call it today. I was up there doing guard duty, guarding the president.

MR: Did you ever get to talk to the president personally? Did you see him often?

LB: No we only saw him once. I was on the funeral detail in Washington DC. In fact I don't go to funerals today. I went to three or four funerals a day on that thing for about two months. I think that was the toughest duty I had!

MR: Why?

LB: Seeing all these people there, sad people. With the war and everything. It was a tough one.

MR: Did you say you were on duty at the President's funeral?

LB: No.

MR: So you had funeral duty, was that in Arlington?

LB: Yes, Arlington.

WC: Whereabouts were you when you heard of the death of the President?

LB: I think it was in 8th and I street.

WC: How did you feel? This was probably the only person that was a president during your lifetime? How did you feel when you found out about that?

LB: It was a loss. You lost a great man.

MR: What was your reaction when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

LB: That one kind of surprised me. I didn't know what an atomic bomb was. In fact when I heard that, I was doing guard duty in the brig at 8th and I. The fellas came and said "They just dropped an atomic bomb!" Well we didn't know what an atomic bomb was, but it didn't take long to find out.

I believe it was a necessity. It ended the war in a hurry.

MR: When were you discharged?

LB: January of 1946, I believe it was.

MR: Were you two married at all at the time?

LB: When I came back I got married.

[AB speaks until 27:21 about how they were married, why, and the early years of their married life]

MR: What was the highest rank that you attained?

LB: Corporal. They were going to make me a Sergeant if I stayed in. They were going to make me a color guard, I was going to be on the color guard in Washington DC. I didn't want that. I'd had enough of that type of duty. I'd have rather gone back to my old division.

It was all rank and file out there, boy I'm telling you. It was nice, it was good, I was with Vandergrift [Lieutenant General Alexander Vandegrift, USMC].

WC: What did you think of him?

LB: Oh we all loved him. He made Commander you know. [Commandant] I must have gone to seven, eight parties he had. He would pick everybody from the 1st [Marine] Division, and we'd go over to his house. I was the doorman, and after he'd had his party, and everyone had left, then he would come out, take his tie off "Come on boys, come on and sit down". He had the Navy chefs there, it's one o'clock in the morning or so, and we'd all be sitting there eating a beautiful supper. Oh he was a nice guy, he loved those guys in the 1st Division.

MR: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill after you left service?

LB: No, no.

MR: How about the "52-20" Club?

LB: I was in there for six months, you couldn't get a job.

MR: Where did you eventually get a job?

LB: Bonded Freightways, truck driver. The fella next door worked there, and that's the job I got, the day before I was going to go down and sign up for Korea. I got that job, I went down there and I was in trucking all my life.

Stayed right with it, petroleum.

MR: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

LB: No, no, I didn't have time for anything. All I did was work.

MR: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in the service with you?

LB: I had different fellas, Adams I was with at Guadalcanal and New Britain. We wrote for years then all of a sudden that was it.

MR: You never went to any reunions or anything?

LB: No, no.

MR: How do you think your time in the service changed, or had an effect on your life?

LB: It really didn't change me. Because when I got out I just put it behind me. I went right on with my life. I didn't talk about the war. Did I discuss it? I just put it behind me and went on and started to get my life together back in trucking.

[AB gives background information on the Buck family's history of military service. Lewis' family is from Massachusetts, and began serving in King Phillip's War in the 1670s. Bucks served in the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, World War II and Vietnam. Lewis' cousin Albert was killed in Vietnam]

LB: You asked me about a memorable time. On New Britain, Sgt. Price and Mitol and I, we had to go on patrol. We didn't land with the division. The army landed an hour away. Borgen Bay [New Britain] was the main invasion. We were the roadblock. We had to stop anything coming through. They sent me out on a patrol. On the way out, at the end of this trail there was a little shack. On the way out, there was only one footprint coming this way, hobnailed. So I put it in my mind and we continued on. We went down over a ridge and down. I climbed up a tree to see what was coming in, and holy Jesus wasn't there a whole string of Japanese coming up through.

I came out of that tree and said "Let's go!" and we took off, we didn't run, quick pace, back through [the way they had come]. Now you have to remember that the jungle where the line was, was on an open hill. But the jungle near an open field is thick and dense. Once you get inside of it, it opens up. We had about 100 yards to go through this

dense material. So we're walking through and holy Jesus, [you could hear] the safeties going off. Weren't the Japs there!

They were overlooking our lines, and we walked right into them. They were throwing their safeties off, and we stopped. Price says, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said, we're going to walk over there, we're going to sit out there and have a can of K rations. This is the truth. We walked out, we sit there and had the K Rations. We were discussing where to go. We couldn't back because the Japs are coming up behind us. Here they were there, we don't know what was on the right or left. So we sit there and I remember what the Coast Watcher said. What he'd told us in school. He said don't forget, they're doing the same thing that you're doing. Give them time and they'll move aside.

So that was going through my mind and we finished the K rations. I figured we've have to do something. So we got up and said, ok let's go. We're walking by right through there. They said, you go. So I led them. The Japs moved aside, we went right on through them in the lines. I want to tell you something, I'm glad somebody didn't fire a shot. If they had, we were right on top of it, we'd have got it too. So we went in, and told them the next morning and they hit right there. They took the line. It rained and when it got light they drove them back out. We captured it.

AB: Lew, tell them how your brother Harry found out about this.

LB: Harry went to Korea. Sgt. Price, who was with me on that detail. He calls Harry, he heard there was a Buck there, so he called my brother in. He said to Harry, did you have a brother Lewis that was on New Britain? Harry said yes. Price said "Do you know what that crazy bastard did?" Because he was with me, and Harry came back and told me all about it.

But it was the only thing we could do, I couldn't think of anything else.

They were right though, when you went out you didn't pick a fight. When two or three of us went out you didn't pick fights. You went out to gather information. I was good at getting that. Then you bring the information back. But you had to be awful careful. They could have never made a movie out of the combat patrols I went on.

See we used to go out, find the enemy, then the next day we'd lead the combat patrol back to where we discovered them. You could never make a movie, everybody would fall asleep. You couldn't hear anybody, as many men as were there, no noise, no sound, no nothing. Everything was in a whisper and quiet. If we discovered somebody, we'd tell them "two or three up there in the front". Just a normal thing, very quiet. Erase them. Shoot them and keep right on going.

In fact, after Borgen Bay [New Britain], they got me and four or five guys, put us on an LSC. We went half way down the island, through the Japanese lines, picked up a native that had killed two missionaries, and came back out, got on the ship and brought the

native back. Now what they ever did to the missionary we don't know, but this was during the war. They sent us down to get that guy.

AB: How about your little hunting trip?

LB: Yes, I'm sleeping in a tent there after the battle, here comes Col. Masters, "Hey Buck, come on, get that Tommy gun and let's go". I said where are you going, he said you'll know the trails. I said yes. He had his aid with him. He says, we're going to go boar hunting. You lead the way.

I took him and we went off through the jungles. He wanted to get a boar. He went all through the jungles trying to get a boar.

MR: Did he find one?

LB: No!

AB: Tell him about your adventure at 4 o'clock in the morning. This is the one that scares me, whenever he tells it, it scares me.

LB: I get a call at night, a yell out.

MR: Where were you?

LB: New Britain, I was on New Britain. "Hey Buck, Come down!" Down I go through the jungles. I'm going through the jungles, walking along and jeez all of a sudden, I walk face-to-face into a guy, just like that. Now when I did, my hand hit his rifle, and I grabbed it by the barrel. The guy, he jumps back, and he fired. It burned my arm a little bit and the bullet went by.

I had the damn Tommy gun slung over my shoulder, and I grabbed my knife and gave a roundhouse swing into that boy, then I went back to get my knife. Col. Masters stands there and he says "Now tell me Buck, just where did he come from?" Somehow or other, he had infiltrated the line and I walk right into him. Jesus. A funny thing.

AB: He has the knife. When he got out Lew said to the guy, "I'd like to have this knife. It saved my life".

LB: I've got my knife.

MR: You still have it? What was it a K-bar?

LB: No, no, mine's a Camillus. I'll show you, this is a good one. Watch her, she's sharp as a razor.

MR: I see that. What do you do you do, sharpen this every night?

LB: Oh no, I kept it sharp over there.

AB: I don't want you to laugh, but we cut our wedding cake with it. He didn't tell you though why he got the V for Valor with the raid that they did and got caught, practically

got blown up. Where the PT boats brought you in...

LB: Three days before the invasion of New Britain we went, they put us on three torpedo boats. We went over to New Britain and got into rubber rafts...And our orders were if we couldn't get out, to go back in about two miles. It's starting to get light out and he strikes a match. We hear the motors start up and they came over and picked us up. On the way out, ain't there a bunch of Japanese barges coming along. So the guy in the PT boat says, "You guys want to have some fun?" Just lay down on the deck, and when we go by we're going to rake them.

Those guys are quicker on the trigger than we were. One shot went off and holy Jesus, they knocked one of the motors out of their PT boat! We got back and they almost blew the mission. Where we landed there was about twenty five feet from shore and the barge went right on up where I went in. Open up the door and there you were, you only had to walk into the ocean about ten or fifteen feet and we got in.

It was different, you weren't charging pillboxes.

MR: Well thank you very much for your interview!

AB: You're welcome.