

**Donald Delevan Elliot
Veteran**

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

**Interviewed on
January 16, 2001
Latham, NY**

Q: Mr. Elliot, What did you do prior to the war?

DE: I worked at Bear Manage or Norton Abrasives and when I came back from the service, that's where I went back to work. I was there for 46 years. I was 24 when I went into service and I ended up in Camp Chaffee Arkansas. I went down to Camp Upton at first and slept there and then in November, and it is cold on that island. And I slept in my suit and everything else. Then they issued us army clothes and all and then went up to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. That's near uh, Fort Smith; and from there we used to, we went through basic training.

Q: What was basic training like?

DE: Oh, that was a big bummer (laughs).

Q: Tell us about it.

DE: Well, First we, uh, well we had to learn all about the guns. We had to go to a firing range. Well they wouldn't let you go there until you learn how to take the guns apart, put them back together again, clean 'em, and they always made sure that you clean them. We went on guard duty without carrying a weapon, but then after you went through the regular rigmarole of learning all about the guns, and then how you should do the tops of the machine gun, with the automatic firing and all; it wasn't like it is today. Then they took us down in Louisiana for maneuvers.

Q: How did that go?

DE: Oh, That was down there where there's, well I wouldn't want to live in Louisiana, I'll tell you that right now. But, there was a lake right there on the other side of Dallas, Texas. It was a beautiful lake and the guys went swimming in it. Of course, they didn't have no bathing suits on, but, (laughs) no women around or anything and when they came out the lieutenant said to them "How did you enjoy your swim?" That was a beautiful lake, it's nice and warm you know. That was in the wintertime too, down there it was summer. He says "you know what's in that lake don't you?" He says "Water moccasin crocodiles". Then we went out to the Mojave Desert in California. While we were there we were transferred over to the 708 amphibious tank battalion. They took a whole battalion of us, and took us away from the 6th Armored Division. We went up to Monterey Bay, and we had to learn all about loading the money on LSTs, and getting off the LSTs. Then they shipped us over to Hawaii.

Q: Now what vehicle were you using?

DE: What did I do in the tanks?

Q: Well what kind of tank was it?

DE: It was an amphibious tank. A very light armor on him, a 30 caliber bullet could knock him out easy, but the Japanese didn't know that, so it was a good thing they didn't. But few of our tanks did get knocked out. On Saipan, they had a 75 howitzer gun on the beach, and you couldn't see that; you could walk right up on it and you couldn't see it. Everyday those Japanese put new camouflage on it. Everyday! So, it looked like it was just a bunch of bushes there, that's it, but there was a gun behind it.

Q: You trained in Hawaii?

DE: Oh no! Saipan, Tinian, Marshall Islands, Okinawa, Philippines.

Q: Your initial training was where?

DE: In the Philippines, in Hawaii. I was stationed at Koko Head. They called it Koko Head. I went visiting, I went up to Schofield Barracks and visited with the 27th, which was over there.

Q: Did you have friends in the 27th?

DE: I had friends in there, yeah. All the guys know me, Kenny Johnson, and we called him Leland Carrier. We had nicknames for him, we called him Horse Carrier (laughs). If you ever know the carriers up in Lansingburgh, you used to run to the store, Diamond Rock Hole. Well that's one of the carriers. And Bud Carrier is still around, His brother.

Q: So you still get to see your friends with the 27th?

DE: Do I want to see my friends at the 27th?

Q: How long were you training with your tank?

DE: We had too much to learn, how to load them on LSTs and how to get them off of there. I was an assistant driver, a radio operator, a machine gunner, and I was the first aid man in the tank. It doesn't show up over my discharge, but that's what I did. I saved one man's life.

Q: How big was the crew of the tank?

DE: Seven men. If that tank is not out, seven men lose it. We were just lucky that we didn't, we didn't lose anybody.

Q: When you left Hawaii, Did you know where you were going?

DE: We never knew where we were going. They wouldn't tell us until we were almost there. They'd bring out the maps and then they'd tell you all about the islands from photographs. You know, that they took from the air. Saipan was the worst one we ever hit. They were waiting for us.

Q: Okay, Can you tell us about that operation?

DE: We went in on the first wave, when we hit the beach. We were firing with everything we had. I was right up in the front (laughs). I wouldn't want to see it again, I wouldn't want to see anybody go through what we had to go through.

Q: Now, Did you go in with the 27th Division, or did you go in with the Marines?

DE: We went in with the Marines. The fourth and second Marine Division was on that Island.

Q: So your job was to support?

DE: Well, support them after we got in, but some of those islands you couldn't use those tanks because of the terrain.

Q: In Saipan you could?

DE: You could, Yes. We were support for the infantry. They would walk around behind you, like they usually do (laughs).

Q: As you're landing in Saipan was there a lot of initial fire there?

DE: There was a lot of small arm fire there, and of course that gun I told you about. It was an old Swiss gun that they had taken from Singapore. They brought it there and they had it all ready, waiting for us. They knocked four of our tanks out. They had these little flags in the water all the way along; we finally found out what they were for. They had their guns zeroed in and when you got right next to them; they moved it over a notch and picked you off.

Q: That gun was knocked out?

DE: That gun was knocked out. One of our gunners saw a puff of smoke. They had it where you couldn't see too much smoke coming out of the barrel of the gun, but he spotted it. He put a shell right down through the middle of it. With the other shell coming out and it blew it off, just peeled it back like a banana.

Q: Once you landed, what happened next?

DE: Well they used this for land when they could. We would support the infantry. We'd go ahead and if there was a machine gun nest we would try to knock it out. Of course the Marines would walk behind us.

Q: How did you get along with the Marines?

DE: Well, we got along great with them. I mean they liked us because we were in front of them (laughs).

Q: So the second day on the island, what were you doing?

DE: We did mutinous on the trucks. We tweaked the bogie wheels, and if there were any bogie wheels that were broken off underneath the water, coral reefs, they would break the cups off. There were cups that rotated in the water on the tracks. They steered the same as a tank. Where you pull on the stick or go to right, or you pull on the left and they'd go to the left.

Q: And you were armed with basically a 30 caliber machine gun.

DE: We were armed with 30 caliber machine guns in the front, up in the turret and in the scarf rings on either side of the turret.

Q: Now after the initial landing in Saipan, Did you assist the marines any further?

DE: Well we were assigned to different ones; the fourth Marine Division would take us and then the second Marine Division would take us. Then we were getting ready for the operation on Tinian. Saipan and Tinian are right there together. Of course you know where the B-29s were flying from.

Q: Were you involved in the operation on Tinian before Saipan had completely fallen?

DE: Yes, we were. They wanted to get that airfield too. They wanted to build an airfield there for B-29s. They had them on Saipan and Tinian.

Q: What was that operation?

DE: Well, There wasn't much there. The Japanese had taken all of their troops, and took most of them to Saipan. See, that was loaded. They really had everything on there.

Q: Did you get to see any of your friends from the 27th Division?

DE: Not while we were fighting, no. We were too busy for that. They had to wait for it to all cool down a little bit and then they gave us passes.

Q: They gave you passes while you were on Saipan?

DE: Yeah

Q: What was that like?

DE: It was just a one day pass. Every army guy with a truck would give you a ride. There was nobody else to give you a ride (laughs).

Q: Where did you go?

DE: We went up to the northern end of the island where the 27th were. They treated us great. Took us into their mess hall and they gave us a nice meal, well whatever they had.

Q: Did they talk at all about the release of Ralph Smith?

DE: Yeah

Q: What was that like?

Oh, (shakes head) I don't Understand what you mean by Ralph Smith.

Q: Well, Ralph Smith was the Army General who Hollins....

DE: Oh Yes! They couldn't get along too well. I understand what you mean (laughs). We heard all about it.

Q: From probably both sides?

DE: Both sides.

Q: What were the 27th Division guys saying?

DE: Well, they liked the Army General. They didn't think too much of the Marine General. I could understand, according to what some of the guys told me; the marines would put the army up in the mountains and they would take the lowland. I hope I don't disturb anybody about this, but it didn't seem right. I mean they were taking all the easy stuff and letting the army take the tough ones. You know in the mountains it's hard to clean them out.

Q: So once Saipan had fallen, what did you do next?

DE: We went back to Hawaii and got ready for the next operation. Which was the Philippines and that was very easy. We didn't have enough tanks to go around for all of our crews and they brought some up from Australia. Then we had enough.

Q: Now who were you attached to when you landed in the Philippines?

DE: Well, I don't really know who they were.

Q: Marines or army?

DE: They were army. A few marines hit some of the islands in the Solomon group, because on the way out we would stop at an island called Ulithi. It's in the Solomon Caroline group. That's where the guys would get their beer (laughs).

Q: So the invasion of the Philippines went?

DE: Pretty easily.

Q: Pretty easily?

DE: Yep.

Q: How long were you in the Philippines?

DE: Well we were there twice. We went there once and we were there, I'd say maybe about a month. We had to do Calisthenics and all that stuff and keep in shape. They even had us doing this on the LSTs. They didn't want you to get used to not doing your stuff in the morning. After that we went back to Hawaii and then they brought us back out there for Okinawa and Iwo Jima.

Have you ever heard of that Island? That's the island Ernie Pyle was killed on. Have you ever heard of him? Did anybody else ever speak of that?

Q: Yes

DE: Well that's the one that Ernie Pyle was killed on. We were on there and we had our one lieutenant, he was from Australia. He wasn't Australian though. He was an American soldier, but he was a first lieutenant. He was just assigned to us as a replacement. The guys tried to tell him, don't stick your head up too long out of that turret because you're going to get nailed and he did.

Q: Did this happen in the Philippines?

DE: No this was on Iwo Jima. That was a small island right off of Okinawa. They didn't fight you too much when you're landing. They waited till he got in there, then they'd open up on you.

They figured they could hit you easier on the land.

Q: There was a seven man crew, so you got to be pretty close?

DE: Oh yes, yes. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but if you or one of your men gets hit and don't come back, you feel bad about it. I mean even if he isn't in your crew. American Soldiers are friends for life. You know that don't you. If you see a Jap, I'm going to be vulgar now, you don't let him live. I mean you can't blame that on all Japanese people. The samurai was the worst. If President Truman hadn't used that atomic bomb, we would still be fighting them. Maybe you don't want to hear that, but that's the way it is. They were training all those people to fight us, you could imagine what lives would have been lost. I'm not trying to preach to you, but these are facts. They had all of their women and children learning how to fight and how to shoot guns. The Japanese people hated us. But now they are finding out that we're different than the natives over on Okinawa and all of those places. We weren't fighting them. We tried to get them out of the way because we didn't want to shoot them. The people who would come out of the caves, they'd have to feed them. We would feed them. We weren't fighting women and children, just soldiers, that's all we were after. They wanted those islands. I don't know what they are doing with them now.

Q: There were a lot of civilians on Okinawa?

DE: Oh Yeah! There were a lot, and there were Japanese soldiers. The Japanese people that were there, the soldiers had them so scared of us, they were jumping off of cliffs. Maybe, you've heard this before.

Q: Did you witness any of that?

DE: Yes, I did. I tried to motion to them, but they didn't understand what I was saying. I motioned to them to get out of the way. They would just stand there, they were too afraid of us to even move. Then finally they got somebody, well this is funny what I'm going to tell you know. They got one woman there and she came out and they started to talk to her and try to get her to get out of the way. She understood every word we were saying. Guess where she was from, University of Southern California. She had a degree from there and she went back to Okinawa to live. We said something to her in Japanese about taking her clothes off and putting her hands up, she was really put off about it. We had to explain to her that we had to do that.

Q: What were your officers like?

DE: Our officers were great. We had no problem with them. We had to be on duty of course and we had to do what they said. They didn't do the things like they did in basic training, like inspect your guns, or anything like that. If you didn't have your gun clean and couldn't shoot, that was on you. Not on anybody else, it was you. You understand what I'm saying (laughs)?

Q: When you were in the Philippines you were under MacArthur?

DE: Yes.

Q: What was the opinion of MacArthur?

DE: Well, he was a great general. We never saw him. We were on the island, but we never saw him. This was after they had been fighting there for a while. We didn't have to

do much fighting. We were getting ready to cipher up on Okinawa. Which we didn't know, they don't tell you. They don't tell you what islands you're going to hit because loose lips sink ships. That's the way they figured it. That's the way we figured it too.

Q: What did you do on leave, say on your way to the Philippines?

DE: There wasn't much to do. When we went on [unclear] to get our beer, there wasn't any for us.

Q: Did you get any USO shows?

DE: No, there was nothing there like that.

Q: You had to entertain yourselves?

DE: Well, we had to clean guns, we had to get the tanks ready, and guard duty, and that's about it. Regular army stuff.

Q: What do you think of your equipment, was it good equipment?

DE: The only thing I found faulty was that the amphibious tanks were not up to par. They were good in what we had, I told you a 30 caliber bullet would knock them out. We had one when we landed on Iwo Jima. I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right, but that was how we used to say it. The guy that made it was a tank commander, he was from Albany. His name was Ralph Brando. He got knocked out going right on the beach, with a 30 caliber bullet.

Q: So your only complaint was the armor in the tank?

DE: The armor in the tank was no armor. They put a piece of armor up there, but they didn't harden the steel. They just put that there to keep us quiet. Maybe I shouldn't say that (laughs).

Q: Do you feel that your training was good training?

DE: It was good training. Of course, when you're going in on the first wave, I don't know how much training you get if your tank is hit. We all wore those, you know those vests at the airfield, and we had the same thing. When you had a cylinder in there that when you press the button, it would fill up with air. You didn't have to blow it up. Then we had our guns, which were the Thompson Submachine guns. We had to watch those, the marines would try to steal them off us, because they loved them. 45s you know (laughs).

Q: They packed a wow.

DE: Oh yes and the clips would go with them too, and the ammunition. The tanks were loaded. We had all kinds of ammunition. We had everything from a 75 Howitzer down to a 37. If the gun was a 75 Howitzer that's what you had. With 45s you didn't have to worry about ammunition. There's never a bullet that would not fire. I don't know what they call that now, but that's how I would describe it. Every bullet we put in that gun would fire.

Q: In a misfire?

DE: No misfire whatsoever. Whoever was back here in the states did a good job of making the ammunition for us, and it's a darned good thing they did.

Q: Did you sleep in your vehicle?

DE: OH, yes! Oh, yes! We never dug a hole. Well first you get out there and you dig a foxhole. There was more protection in the tank though. We had one man up on the turret and he would alert the rest of us if anything happened. We had a machine gun on the front of the tank outside and one on the back of the tank where the motor was. Well if anything happened they had these flares flying every night. We would shoot flares up every night. We would call on the radio, and we had it going and that's where I usually slept. The radio would wake me up. One night I went on the radio for the company that was attached to a battalion for the marines. They wanted to get a good operator, but I don't know if I'm that good or not, but anyways that's what they did. The sergeant told me to go on the tank and go over there. I took my gun with me. I was on from 10 o'clock at night till 6 o'clock in the morning. And you couldn't sleep because you never knew when they were going to call you. When you're attached to an outfit, they might call you anytime. I had to know where the company commander was sleeping so that I could wake him up. I didn't like to walk out there at night. You never walked at night. In combat, you never got up and walked around at night, I don't know if anybody has ever told you that.

Q: Did you have infantry dug in around you?

DE: Well, not really, no. We had to do our own guard duty. One guy would have to stay awake, and then you'd stay awake two hours, and then he'd be on two hours and you'd sleep for four. Then you would be back on again, and you'd get up in the turret.

Q: How many tanks did you generally operate with?

DE: There were five tanks to a platoon. There were four platoons. Well, about 20 or 30 tanks. 20 to 25 tanks rather.

Q: Did you keep up with your friends after the war?

DE: I've got one friend of mine that lives out on the Burden Lake Road, and another that lives in Ephrata (?), Pennsylvania. He's a Pennsylvania Dutchman. He lost his accent when he was in the army. His name is Johnny Haller. I still call him up every once and a while on the phone or I'll send him a Christmas card. Then Eddie Kelb lives out on the Burden Lake Road and he was my sergeant. He used to give me a break every once in a while.

Q: So, after Okinawa, What happened?

DE: Well, We hit Iwo Jima first and then we came over on Okinawa and we did what they called beach guard. We had machine guns lined up all along the beach at Naha. Have you ever heard of the town called Naha? Oh you've talked to some people over there. Well, anyways, they put us on a beach guard down there because our tanks were no good on Okinawa.

Q: Why's that?

DE: Because of the terrain. And with Naha, The Japanese wanted to declare it an open city, maybe you've heard this before. Every time we tried to run our tanks through there, they'd knock 'em out. So they leveled the city. They were bricks when we were there.

They blew all the buildings right apart. They put us on beach guard because the Japs were on one side, and there was a harbor that ran right up through the city. The Japs were on one side and we were on the other. They put us there so that if they tried to come in, they couldn't. So one night, (we were told before this happened), the 77th infantry who were in the army came in rubber boats. They had been over where the Japanese were. We knew they were coming in at dark. If it was the japs they wouldn't have made it. We had a little house that we built, and we would have woken the other guys and the machine guns would have been blasted. We knew they were coming in so we didn't bother waking up the other guys. I was on duty then. I told them, Come on in, it's alright. One of the guys from the 77th, who was dressed in all black and just came in, said to me "gee it's good to hear English again"(laughs).

Q: So how long were you on beach guard duty?

DE: It was about a week or two.

Q: And after that?

DE: They took us out of there and we went back on an LST and took us back to Hawaii. Well we landed in the Philippines and from there we came back to Hawaii. And on the way back the war ended.

Q: So, where were you exactly when the war ended?

DE: Out on a ship. We were on an LST on the way back and they're slow.

Q: What thoughts went through your mind when you heard that the war was over?

DE: What am I going to do now? And I was greatly relieved. When you went on an operation, you didn't know whether you were going to come back or not, or what you were going to do. I came back amazed. I think I was off for about a month and then I went back to Norton Abrasives and went to work.

Q: What was it like coming home?

DE: Well, I'll tell you something, I was doing a job there and when you've been away for three and a half years and they gave me my job back; they were great with me, you don't want to do that job again. So, I bid on other jobs in Norton Abrasives until I got the job I wanted. Then I retired in '83. I got out and now I've been retired ever since except for doing security work.

Q: So, what was homecoming like in Troy?

DE: What was it like?

Q: Yeah, was there a parade?

DE: No, no parades. Nobody really knew me. That's the same way it was for me when I used to come home on the furlough, all the young fellas would be in the navy or the marines, so I got back one day early one time because there was nobody around, and nobody was around then too.

Q: Does the name Maine Fae ring a bell?

DE: Ohhh yesss, I do remember her, but I never went down there?

Q: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

DE: I was at the Troy Theater. Remember the Troy Theater on River St.? I sat there and it came up on the screen, and it said the Japanese have hit Pearl Harbor. I said Goodbye (laughs). I was 1H then and about a week later I got 1A. I went down to Washington Ave. Armory in Albany and we're all walking around there naked as a jaybird and there was one, can I say this, one fella didn't want to take his underwear off. I don't want to say what he was, but maybe you can use your own judgement on that. Will this be bad for kids to look at? Well, they probably know more than I do (laughs). That's the way it was, so I told him to go home because his character wasn't wanted in the service.

Q: How did you feel about your contribution when the war was over? Was it worth it to you?

DE: Yes, It was. This is the greatest country in the world. If you hear about other countries and the way they are, you know it. I'm not sorry I fought for them, not a bit. A lot of these younger fellas, if they get a chance, I don't mean that they should go in and fight or anything, but if they get a chance, there's nothing wrong with the service. It teaches you to take orders and some of these kids today, can't take orders. They don't even take orders from their people. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I've got the wrong idea; I'm not trying to preach to you or anything like that. But you've got to learn to take orders before you can give orders.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about your military experience?

DE: Well, I had to take a lot of guff, I was in with what they call rednecks. They didn't like us.

Q: And these were guys from?

DE: South.

Q: The south.

DE: (laughs) I'm not going to say anymore, but they didn't care for us too much. Some of them found that after a while they were going to go back, well after they got through basic training with us, we got furloughs. We came home on a 15 day furlough. We were out in California and it took six days to get home, and you only had nine days home. You know three days there and three days back was all on the furlough.

Q: This was with the 6th armored division?

DE: This was with the 6th armored division.

Q: So, there were a lot of southerners in the 6th armored division?

DE: OH yes. First sergeants. I don't have anything against the southerners, but they were still fighting the civil war (laughs). I hope if the southerners see me they won't be mad at me, but that's the way it was.

Q: Were you able to get some leave when you were in Arkansas?

DE: Yes, I got home on a 15 day furlough. Once. Then once from California. I had two furloughs. When you go overseas you don't get any furloughs.

Q: What was it like in Arkansas, dealing with the locals?

DE: The locals were nice to us. They were down at Portsmouth, well they didn't have anything until the army camp was built there. That was Camp Champion, Camp Champion was used for the Japanese Americans that were taken from the west coast and brought to that camp. They used it for that. They took the army out of there.

Q: Any other stories?

DE: Well, let's see. No I don't think so.

Q: What's your fondest moment?

DE: My fondest, well, the moment when they put me in for T5 and I didn't get it (laughs). Well I'll tell you that was the first sergeants that didn't like me. I'm very outspoken and I said something to somebody and they didn't like what I said, so that fixed it up for me.

Q: What's the funniest moment?

DE: Oh, Now wait a minute, let me think. Geez I can't think of any funny moments. There are probably a lot of them, but if I did tell you I'd probably repeat some.

Q: Well, thank you very much. It was a great interview!

DE: Well, I hope I did alright for you.

Q: You did a fine job, a great job.

DE: Well, I told you as it was, like I did when I was on PYX. You know I was on there? Did you ever hear me? They're great friends of mine now.

Q: Very Good.