

Joseph Waldron

Oral History Project

April 16, 2004

I would like to begin by introducing my oldest living Uncle. His name is Hawley John Waldron Jr. and was the ~~second~~^{first} born of 11 brothers and sisters, one of those being my father. He was born and raised in Mechanicville, New York and continues to live there now. Hawley is now 80 years "young," as he likes to put it. Growing up in a family where military life was ever present, having had his Father serve in World War One and also have ³ other brothers go on to serve for our country, his decision to serve was not too difficult. Hawley entered the Marine Corps in January of 1942.

Well during the interview and my Uncle Hawley takes out a small bag, he pulls out what looked to be a year book and also a wooden box with the Marine Corp logo on the top of it with his name engraved on the side. Its contents included, a purple heart, a little star, and the remains of a bullet. He opens the box and begins to describe the content inside the box.

I was wounded about twice during the War. I got hit about four times. If you are wounded more than twice they send you one of these (a star). At one time I had three purple hearts but I had to send them back because then they sent me the star. This is one of the bullets they took out of me. It had a big piece of lead with a big case around the lead but I lost that years ago. The other bullet went right through me, but that one you see broke a bone, you see how it's bent, it broke a bone in my back. And they dug that out and said, "here's a souvenir" so I threw it in my back sack and I've had it ever since. But back home when I come home, the lead was sticking out of it and I was showing my

father and it just fell off so I wasn't able to save the lead from it. But oh well. And this is the book I got. It's like a Marines Yearbook; this shows you what regiment I was in. I was in the twenty-fifth regiment. E-company. You have ah' regiments consisting of three battalions, there was the twenty third, twenty fourth, and twenty fifth. I was in the twenty-fifth. In fact, when I got out of boot camp, Paris Island after twelve weeks. I went to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. And I was in what they called the Twenty Third Regiment second battalion E-Company in the US Marine Corps. And at that time we were forming the fourth Marine division. So therefore they had the twenty- fourth regiment they were forming in Camp Pellifin in California, we had the twenty- third regiment in Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Because of the fact that there were so many young men enlisting in the army at that time, they wanted to form the twenty-fifth regiment. So they took half of E company, half of G company, half of all these companies so they could form the twenty-fifth regiment. So I went from E-company twenty-third to E-company twenty-fifth. And I was with E-company twenty fifth right through the war.

I decided to enlist in the Marines December 15, 1942; I was eighteen at that time. I graduated from High School in June, and ah I went in, in December. As I say I went through Paris Island to Camp Lejeune, and from camp Lejeune we went, six months later about October, by ship, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We went through the Panama Canal. Our Regiment was known as Camp Pendleton, but we were in ocean side California, south of Los Angeles to a place that was known as Las Pucas Canyon. We were out in the canyon, our regiment, and ah we did all sorts of maneuvers out there. I

would say it was tough, very rough. But it was good because the training I loved, I loved that physical part.

We left Las Pucas combat loaded around the third of January, 1944. We went combat loaded right from the states to the Marshall Islands. Kwajalein Atoll, it was the first Japanese territory to be hit by United States Forces. And within the Marshall Islands consisted many other islands, Atoll, and the big island was Kwajalein. That's why they named it Kwajalein Atoll. The Air Stripes were on the Island of Namorik, and Roi. The island of Ebeye had a big radio station on it so that is the Island our battalion hit. And the two other battalions hit other islands. All the while the twenty- third regiment was hitting Majuro. In the meantime, the Twenty-fourth regiment was in reserves in case we needed them. That operation went pretty smooth, we lost, naturally, but it went pretty well. And our battalion that hit the radio station, we only encountered little resistance, there was only a few Japs' on there and it didn't take long for us to secure that Island.

Soon after the take over of that Island, we had to go to the big Island of Kwajalein, which an Army outfit had already been occupying. I forget the figures on how many Army soldiers we had in there but anyway, they pulled out and we had to go down there and secure it. In other words, we had to swipe it up. Whatever Japs' were left down there, in the caves, up in the hills, we needed to take out. We were there 28 days and ah well, it was nerve racking more than anything else because you never knew what was ahead of you. We didn't know if the Japs' were going to bring any more Japs', it was all new to us it was our first operation and it was new to us. Being scared, well if you want me to talk about being scared while coming over in the boat to fight I wouldn't say I

was scared so much as I was seasick. I got seasick and that's the worst feeling in the world. But, being there the length of time I was I got used to it.

Then after the Marshall Islands they brought us back to Maui the Island in Hawaii. That was our rest camp. We trained, we ran maneuvers all around, we worked out unbeknown to us in June, that we would be going back there, I would say around the first of March. And ah, in June we had to get ready to hit another Island.

So we got aboard the LST's Landing Ship Tanks, the armies LST's they were loaded with fuel, barrels of fuel, and they had what they called on there LCMs' Landing Craft Mechanize. But anyway, we were out doing maneuvers this one particular Sunday on our LST along with the eleven others in the water around us and we began to come under attack . We had a big explosion, Pearl Harbor and according to the book I got at home, The West Locks Story, it was the second best kept secret of World War Two. We lost seven or eight LST's and I was lucky I was on the one that stayed afloat. We had a Naval lieutenant aboard that Sunday afternoon and he backed us out of the Harbor. We had some sort of schooling and I was sitting up there in the LCM there, it was a beautiful day and all the sudden we heard this explosion. Well, I see a torso just torn apart because his body went right into the gun pit of the LST of the 40-millimeter. Then I see these dead bodies everywhere, one ship went up in flames, then another then another, then the one right next to us. They kept just blowing up. Then , this lieutenant Bruce, Ill never forget his name, went down and got the motor started and he backed us outta there. Wow, talk about scared, oh my god, frightening, and we only had one man who dove off the ship. But you never abandon ship until you get the word. So we got him and he got back up there. I was so scared I was hanging on the anchor because I wasn't that much of

a good swimmer so I told this Charlie Bass, I'll always remember he was a big guy and he could swim. I said Charlie if we have to go in, I can swim but I says to him keep your eye open for me. He said don't worry about it. Anyway, I'm holding on to this big anchor in the back of the ship and I look below me and I see the Gunny Sergeant, the Gunny Sergeant was below me, this guy had a big mustache, his name was Martinez. I said, "What do you think gunny?" I said, "we wont have to jump to far if we have to get off." But anyway it worked out. And this was in May 13, 1944, that's when they cancelled the operation to Saipan. The next day these LST's come in, new troops come in, of course we didn't know how many men we had lost, we lost quite a few. But my buddy, a fella from town, he got a clipping from his mother, it was just a small clipping and all it said was LST explosions in Pearl Harbor, x number of men drowned and killed, but man were there a lot more than what was said in that article. And that's all that was ever said and you didn't hear nothing about that until I was married and my brother in-law brought it up.

So on June 15, 1944, we headed out for Saipan, boy that was a rough, rough operation. They got us in there and the Japs had us zeroed right in with artillery and heavy fire and everything you know. A lot of men got hit coming off the tanks but fortunately we got in to our place. We had to go approximately 1500 yards to set up. The enemies, unbeknown to us you see, Saipan was loaded with sugar cane fields, they had this tower, and at the top of this tower they had Japs' firing and directing fire towards us. We didn't know, but anyway we eventually took that tower down.

The territory was rough, there was pillboxes here and there, we saw small houses, little huts, you know, they were the houses. There'd be civilians in there unbeknown to us

because you see we thought everybody was the enemy. At one pillbox we come up on which was ground level because these things were built into the ground, and we come up on it and we hear crying and yelling and this guy come out. We didn't throw any grenades in there because we heard this crying. We were all suckers for kids because nobody wanted to kill a kid. So this fella comes up with this white shirt on and his wife and two kids. We sent em back, what happened to them, who knows we couldn't worry about them. But anyway we got dug in to where we were supposed to be.

Well the war went on and that lasted thirty some odd days securing spots on the islands. I got hit on that island; a shell went off right next to me forcing me into the hospital. After recovery, they wanted to send me home but I figured I'd be all right you know, so I went back to my outfit. Unbeknown to me, if I knew where we were going to Iwo Jima I woulda went home (with a laugh). But anyway I did get back to my outfit. I had the occasional headaches from the shell going off, but I was glad it wasn't anything too serious.

The next operation was at the Island of Iwo Jima. And that's where all the flag raising and all that took place. And that was ah, February 19th, my birthday, we hit that on my birthday. And we going in that morning and we see this big Mountain, Mount. Seraboche and ah it was shaped like a pork chop, unbeknown to us they prepared that island, the Japs did, they had 20 years to get ready for an invasion you see. And they dug these tunnels underground, they had a hospital underground, they had, unbeknown, we got in there, you'd get to a pill box, and you didn't see nothing but you knew there was Japs out there but all the sudden they were gone. You see what they'd do was they had these tiny little holes behind rocks, and these Japs' would climb down in there. And these

Japs could crawl into these holes like you couldn't believe. And they'd all be under ground. So as I say, that Island was really a tough, tough Island. Where we would set up at night, there was all Volcanic ash, it was sandy. Oh you throw two scoops out and one would come back, you had to get down in there. And we had two men in a foxhole for one reason; one guy would have to look one way and the other guy the other way. They would pop up from anywhere. For example, one night I was diggin with my buddy there and I looked up and there was a Jap in a brand new uniform with a rifle and he couldn't have known we were there, all the sudden there was a shot and I looked up and I said "where did it come from?" and I looked over. You didn't dare stick you head up from the foxhole. It seemed like every time somebody stuck their head up he got killed. And we lost so many men they used to send us some eight or nine men and I'd tell em, I don't wanna know your name, I don't want ugh, cause you didn't want to get to know em. So I'd put em in a hole with somebody, a veteran, in other words someone who has gone through the battles. And the last thing I'd tell em, "You know who to throw a grenade? You know how to.." "yup, yup" "Well keep your head down!" I'd say. Don't stick your head up until you are told to. You see they would hear noises and stick their head up and they'd get killed. And you know. It was terrible. I lasted eight days on the island. I was wounded pretty badly on the eighth day. You see we were right up there in the front, I had three men in one hole, a guy over here, and I was here I went over and yelled to this guy, "whose on your flank?" and he says "nobody" so I go back and I says "Well Im gonna tell these three guys in the hole to take off." Yeah so I get down there and I tell them to take off cause we were up there all alone and there was heavy fire coming form everywhere. So as soon as I got to the top of the hole, I got nailed, they shot me in my

back. I landed in the hole, I was alright but I was numb from the waist down. I couldn't get a feeling in my legs. So I sent the three guys back, and I said go back and call up for artillery so to lay out smoke so I could get out of there because there were a lot of Japs shooting at us. You know so I called my buddy over and he stayed with me. And around fifteen to twenty minutes later I see the smoke come in I says "oh boy here we go," but now I'm getting outta here. But I got outta the hole and I had two buddies that had come up and I knew good, seeing how I was in the outfit for going on three years, they were like brothers you know? These two guys come up with a poncho, the three of them they laid it, the three of them rolled me in it and brought me back. And I got back and I went aboard a ship and eventually went home. But as I say this outfit I was in they claim they say we saw more action in 14 months then any other outfit. We hit Marshall islands, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. And as I say I came back to the states, I was in the hospital in Oakland. And the war went on.

You see I found out later on, the reason we hit Iwo, that these B-29s, these big super fortresses that carried these bombs, and they bombed Japan from Saipan and Tinian the Islands, the ones we just hit, they had the big air strips so our planes could land. But, a lot of them ran out of fuel on the way back from Japan so the Island of Iwo Jima, in order for them to land on Iwo for them to refuel we had to take it out. In fact the first night, you see, we had a lot of men up there, I don't think we even had the air field secured and a plane flew down, crippled but it was able to fly you know. It refueled and took off, a lot of the crafts landed in the water and other such areas that's why Iwo Jima was so important. I don't know how many planes landed there exactly but there was a lot I tell you that much. When I was recuperating in Scotia, August 15th the war was over.

That's when they dropped the atomic bomb to end the war, I then went on to Norfolk Virginia and I got discharged. I got discharged November 1945.

When they dropped the bomb I knew there would be a lot of controversy following it but I believe the two bombs were necessary. We gave them a warning after the first one, and they dropped one and they asked them. Do you want to surrender, or we will drop another one, so they gave them three days and they didn't surrender. So the next day we dropped the one on Nagasaki. You know there were ports there at Nagasaki; now I know there were a lot of civilians killed but that was a big Naval Base, Nagasaki was. And so right after that they surrender. But I say yes, I wish we dropped that before we hit Iwo Jima, that's what I said, But there was so many lives saved because of those bombs. I know we lost a lot, our outfit alone lost close to 7,000 men, that's a lot and you figure there is over a little 20,000 men in a division. But ah it was ah the Marine corps I Liked. I liked the training, I didn't like the combat part. Nobody wants to go over there and get shot and killed and ah its either you know, kill some one or be killed. But you know, its no good, and they say you forget, you don't forget, 60 years later I still go to bed at night and think about it. I don't know, when I got back home i started working two jobs. People would ask me, what are you working two jobs for? Well you know a good reason was I concentrated my mind on working these jobs. It took my mind off what happened. And being a young farmer from a small town that was a big thing for my life time, the Marine Corps, the War. And what did I have to think about when I came home, I lost a lot of good friends but it was just one of those things in life.

Oh, I really enjoyed serving my country. The Marine Corps made a man of me; it makes a man out of you. I love to talk to Marines today, they are mannerly, sincere and

polite, I don't know, the service is good as far as that goes. As I say it takes all kinds to make a world, you need educated men, they were the brains behind the outfit. I couldn't stand Joe McCarthy very well, I knew him and a few others, but I never took a liking to him.

I signed up to be a Marine because my father was a Marine, and I said I didn't want to get drafted. In fact in April or May of the following year I would have been drafted. And this way here I got the pick of service I wanted. I wanted the Marine Corps, so I went with a friend of mine Albert, he was killed on Iwo, I went in with him. Danny Marcelli from town here, he was also in. We had a lot of Mechanicville boys that were in the Marine Corp; fortunately a lot of them came back.

When the war first started you see, people around here were not too scared about being attacked on our own soil. Not around here, but on the coast, San Francisco, out around there, yes they were scared. You see the Japs they coulda come right in. They coulda bombed the coast. This is what I said and continue to say, this country has a lot to be thankful for. They never got the bombings the other countries got, they never got the fire, they never had to get up in the middle of the night and go to an air raid shelter. So as I say we've got a lot to be thankful for. But if Japan was smart at the time, they woulda surrendered after the first bomb. They had a lot of smart officers yet they still took orders from their generals, just as we took orders from Washington. A far as the atomic bomb, well a lot of people were against it , I don't blame em, but to me our next operation would have been to hit Japan. And we would have lost over a million men. The (Japs) didn't care whether they lived or died, they died for the homeland. Oh' the kamikaze planes, you know that's what scares you. That, and you see, they'd come running up to

you with a bomb attached to their back yelling "surrender surrender" and then just blow them selves up. Yea I saw that, I saw a lot of things that happened, unbelievable what happened. I felt sorry for the children and the families of these Islands. They were farmers, they knew nothing else, its to bad they were involved. But it would have happened with this country any way, sooner or later . And for this Country to fight on two fronts Germany and Japan, we did a wonderful job. But everybody at the time the age groups they were all behind (Japan). Everybody was involved with this war and that's why we did such a good job.

We also came out of the depression, I lived through the depression, brought up through the depression, you father as well. That was rough but you know we had gardens we had chickens we always ate good. But we had fun, we had fun with what we had. As I say, you don't miss anything if you don't have anything you know what I mean. After the War all this stuff come out, which we never had before. We lived and had a lot of fun with what we had. We didn't have basketball, ahh someone would have one in the neighborhood but I don't regret anything from growing up or the day I signed up to be a United States Marine.



MIKE McMAHON/For The Saratogian
Mechanicville American Legion Post 91 members, from left, Don Daley, Hawley Waldron and Post Commander Bob Kotraba, stand beside a memorial at the post in Mechanicville. The three veterans planned to travel to Washington, D.C. to attend the World War II Memorial dedication today.

^{Saratogian 5/29/64} Mixed emotions for vets as they await WWII monument dedication

By JENNIFER C. KERR
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most of their comrades are dead now, making today's dedication of the National World War II Memorial bittersweet for the tens of thousands of elderly veterans on hand.

Marvin Spencer, who toured the site Friday with his wife, Helen, said the memorial is a lasting tribute to those who served and a history lesson for future generations.

"About all of us are going to be gone in 10 years, but other people will see it and know what we did," said Spencer

82, an Army infantryman who suffered a serious injury to his right arm during a decisive battle in Metz, France, in 1944, the so-called "unknown battle" that captured the Nazis' final fortification on the Moselle River.

Navy and Coast Guard veteran Jack Walsh said the memorial brought back painful memories of those who didn't return from the war. "I never thought about them until I came here," said Walsh, of Johnstown, Ohio.

He walked the plaza of the memorial with his wife and scores of other vets. Some snapped pictures of the

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