

**Joseph S. Ciufu**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clark, Mike Russert**  
**Interviewer**

**Interviewed on**  
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**Radisson Hotel**  
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**MR:** Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please

**JC:** Okay, Joseph, middle name is Samuel, last name is Ciufu. I was born in Rochester, New York, October fourth, 1926.

**MR:** What was your school background prior to service?

**JC:** Well I quit high school to join the Navy in my senior year.

**MR:** So you enlisted?

**JC:** Yes sir, yeah I did.

**MR:** Okay, do you recall where you were and how you learned and your feelings about Pearl Harbor? How you learned about it?

**JC:** I don't remember exactly where I was. My dad had taken me fishing that day, it was a warm day, and he told me if I washed the car, why, he'd take me fishing that afternoon, and he did. On the way back we had the car radio on and found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese.

**MR:** Do you remember your feelings about this at all?

**JC:** Well I think I was, if I'm not mistaken, I was about 15. I just turned 15 at the time. I really don't, expect I knew we would win.

**MR:** Now you said you enlisted, when did you enlist?

**JC:** Well you see, I signed up in May of 1944, they called me to active duty, I think it was the eighth of September, 1944. I went to boot camp, at Sampson.

**MR:** Okay, why did you pick the navy?

**JC:** Well, you know my father and uncles were World War 1 veterans, and after listening to some of the stories about combat in Europe and World War 1, why, I figured if I was going to get shot up I'd rather do it in the navy at sea. At least I get a bunk every night. It's from the way they talked about World War 1 I think I'd prefer the navy.

**MR:** Okay, what was it like at Sampson, how long were you there, what were the conditions like?

**JC:** We were only there a short time. I think we were there six or seven weeks. We basically, we were trained for the navy. We took the aircraft identification course, the swimming. We had a five inch don simulator we fired. And that was it. Like I said we were basically trained to join the fleet.

**MR:** Have you ever gone back to Sampson?

**JC:** Yeah, I've gone, they've got a museum there. In fact, I sent them my boot camp graduation pictures.

**MR:** Alright, after Sampson where did you go?

**JC:** Well after Sampson they didn't waste too much time. We had I think a five day recruit leave, boot camp leave. They had a train waiting for us and we shipped out, we wound up in California a week later. And at an amphibious training base, I don't remember the name of it, we were only there a couple days and they lined up a bunch of buses and put us on a bus and took us over to deliver more camp parts in California. Near Livermore, California, it was a Seabee base. I knew nothing about construction; I don't think any of the other fellows would because we were all about the same age. Very few of us, in navy boot camp, we were only at a rifle range for a couple days. Well, first thing they did, they gave us fatigues, planks, rifles, combat boots, helmets, gas masks, machetes, knives, and the next morning we were off in the rifle range. We spent about good two or three weeks; meantime they cancelled everybody's leave. And we were in Hawaii before Christmas, and then we shipped out.

**MR:** Did you go by convoy?

**JC:** Oh yeah, in fact we were on a ship called the Sea Flier. It was a converted piece by merchant ship. It was in old one, I think it was built in the early 1920s. When they fired the guns you could see the rust fly off the size of the ship. When we got to Hawaii we started, we had marines from the first breed division. Fellows that were on the Guantanamo canal were our instructors. We threw hand grenades and then they set up this village where they fired machine guns over us, mind you I joined the navy and I never expected this, but anyhow they do the best they can. It wasn't long they put us on another ship, another convoy, and we wound up in the Marshall Islands in Eniwetok. We didn't stay there long, probably about a week. In fact, I never went ashore, I stayed aboard ship. And the ship pulled out again, a short time after that we wound up a Saipan. Now, Saipan had been secured about five or six months before we got there. A couple days after we landed I saw my first live jab. Then there were more of those little boogers running around after the island was secured, but anyhow, full guard duty every night. A lot of shooting going on, I don't know if I killed a goat one night. They were

scuttled because the japs were getting in our chow line. When I was pulling guard duty at the main gate they had us check under the trucks and the back of the trucks and they said a lot of them were slipping in trying to get food. As far as training went, when I was in Saipan I signed up for small boat training which consisted of putting you on a boat and having you run the boat and how to start it and how to shut it off where to check the oil and where to fuel it. The rest of the day we spent just running around with the boat. I was on an LVCP, landing craft, about 35, 36 feet long held about 30 men. We didn't stay on Saipan too long, next thing we know we got our transports. The thing I remember about that on a dock opposite our ship, a hospital ship bringing the wounded back in from Hirojima, I think it took about a day and a half to get all the wounded off. We didn't know where we were going from here with our transports. Like I said, at 17 or 18 I wasn't really that worried about it. We got out to sea and just before we got to Okinawa, which was the first week in April, we didn't land on L-day or D-day which was April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945, we landed a couple days later at White Beach on the bunker bay side of the island just north of the anchor lines which they called the Shurey line ran from Yana Buru on the island beyond the south east coast up through a place called Shurey castle on the Naha which was the capital, that's where the japs dug in. Because the first week from the guys that were there, there was very little activity as far as land combat. It really didn't start until a week later when we ran into the japs at the Shurey line. My biggest problem was the kamikaze. We got on the boat and every day those little buggers would show up in daylight and they'd be there and they had a lot of ships, quite a few of them. In fact, one of the fellows I was going to bring with me, ask Wayne about, Jean Ross, was on a ship called the Snelling which was hit by a kamikaze. And I saw them plow into the doors on an LST that was up at the beach with the doors open. They got their share. When you get aboard ship and you're standing on a tub and looking behind the gunner, you could see those bullets go right through there. The guy's pilots would be so close you could see them. I've heard guys say they could count their teeth, you wonder how they made it. Then there were days when it was kind of overcast, with the wind and clouds, you could hear them flying around. It isn't like today where you could lock them in a radar and knock them down; we had to see them to shoot them down. They came out of the clouds real quick. You could hear them flying around the next time they came out and they'd hit us. You didn't have much time to do anything, and they'd hit us. But Okinawa, the land operation lasted about three months. During the day like I said we were out on the boat. At night the platoon leader would get us together and we'd eat our rations and we'd go out on patrols. We'd either patrol the beach or set up an ambush that some of the work parties would have equipment or food or water stolen and they'd tell us to go over. That didn't bother me, what really scared the daylights out of me was turning around and having some kamikaze headed right for you. If they had machine guns they could have killed us many, many times, but I guess they just didn't want the weight or whatever, fortunately.

**MR:** So you were on the beach most of the time then?

**JC:** Well during the day I was on the water with the boat, and at night like I said, we ordered to our patrol leader and they set up patrols for us, usually along the beach to make sure that the japs weren't getting in behind the marines.

**WC:** So basically you were acting as an infentreatment too.

**JC:** Yeah, unfortunately. I used to kid the GI's, call them brown pounders.

**MR:** What kind of weapons did you have?

**JC:** I had an M1, 30 caliber.

**MR:** Did you have a helmet?

**JC:** Oh yeah, we had all the equipment.

**MR:** Now what did you wear as a uniform?

**JC:** We had Marine Corps fatigues. The same fatigues that the Marine Corps wore.

**WC:** Did you patrol with marines also?

**JC:** Oh yeah, we did go out with the marines a few times, in fact quite often. We had one patrol where we were getting shot at from some village that was nearby. I was in B Company; they sent most of my company in there. They told we had to clean up anyone, take all the civilians out. Any man that looked like he could pull the trigger we were supposed to separate them. We had a man in our company, his name was Wetzel, I forget his first name, but anyway he rounded the corner and there was some jap there that pointed a rifle at him, and fortunately Wetzel had the presence of mind to push the rifle aside and hit him in the side, he did take the rifle away from the jap and killed him. Usually they were pretty scarce, we saw a few of them and shot a couple of them, but nothing like marines, those fellows had their work cut out for them.

**WC:** How did you get along with the marines?

**JC:** We got along better with the marines than we did with the navy. Like I said most of our instructors were all Marine Corps. Since we had a lot of their equipment we were issues a lot of their equipment and their uniforms. When it was cold we were issued those Marine Corps wool shirts. We got their boots and their blankets, they said USMC on them. In fact I often wondered why they just didn't get rid of the Seabees or just get rid of the marines, because they had marine engineers. I had a close friend of mine who was in the fifth division of marine engineers. He was on Hirojima. After Okinawa was secured it got kind of monotonous, very monotonous, a lot of trouble, a lot of fights, arguments. The army came up with the University of Okinawa, a study center. I went to my company commander and told him I'd like to go, and I was one of the four people who were picked to go. The school lasted about two or three months.

**MR:** What did you learn?

**JC:** I remember I took English, Physics, History; I took a math course I forget which math course it was, then I had an elective and I took typing. Best thing I ever did. Especially with the computers, now you can just type away like nothing happened. Well they closed the school anyhow. The scuttlebutt was that someone had written to congress saying that if we can go to school in Okinawa why can't we go to school in the states, and they closed the school. I went back to the Battalion, and was made a Battalion master with arms for some reason, and we ran the Messaw. Phil, he used to live in Florida, he just moved back up north here, and we ran the Messaw until we got the order that we thought we were going back to the states, and instead when we boarded the ship, we went to japan. We stayed in japan for well, a short time. We went to Tokyo Bay Yokohama, and I don't think we stayed there more than a month, in fact I never left the dock area, and some of the fellows did go to Tokyo. There was nothing standing between Yokohama and Tokyo. The air force did a hell of a job. The thing I remember about being on the dock is I stood watch one night, and we were on the dock when they shoved us up to the deck because they was a railroad track going across the deck. One night I went down the galley, things very informal at the time, and one of the cooks gave me a couple sandwiches to take with me. So I went up on deck and I was walking along the ship and I heard a big commotion. I looked down and they had search lights and spotlights on. One of the rail cars had fallen off the track. The Japanese work crew, they were jabbing away working like hell trying to get that thing back on the track. One of them saw me eating a sandwich, he put his hands up, and so I threw him one. They were starving; they went after that sandwich like a pack of animals went after a piece of meat. In a way I felt bad for them. That didn't last long; I figured that we did what we had to do when they had it coming. After that, one day we were transferred to another ship, put on an APA. Found out we were going back to the states. So we went back, pulled into Seattle, went to Bremerton, I think that was the base for Seamus station. At Bremerton, since I had lost all my clothes in one of the typhoons in Okinawa.

**MR:** You were there during the typhoons?

**JC:** Yes sir, there were basically two of them, one in September and one in October.

**MR:** Were you on sea or on land?

**JC:** Well I was on a boat for one of them, they sent a small boat and we were anchored to these big anchor buoys, the waves started breaking over the ship. We called in and they said don't worry. I could see the shore, we could see the beach. They sent a whale boat out to pick us up and the whale boat got swamped, but anyway, we finally made it on to the whale boat, we finally got ashore and hid in a cave until it blew over. It was kind of comical because it was a sea plane base there and they used to tie the planes down by the wings to blocks embedded in the concrete. The only things that were left

were the piece of metal from the end of the cables. No more planes, we were watching our Messaw, it looks like somebody threw a deck of cards up in the air when that went. I have some pictures home of white beach where some ships are on their side up on the beach and there isn't water in sight. That wind was pretty windy. I don't think it's as bad though from what I hear about some category five hurricanes in Florida. Winds up to 140, 150 miles an hour. These were pretty good, the strongest winds I've ever seen, and it did a lot of damage. But like I said, it's Seattle we have no equipment and were given 45 days to get to the Brooklyn navy yard. We went down to the railroad station and bought train tickets. Next day the railroads went on strike. We went to the bus station and wound up taking a greyhound bus. I went back to Rochester. We stopped at every town, wound up having a few beers and missing most of the buses. I think I had about a week left at home to get back to the base, get back to Brooklyn. I stayed in Brooklyn probably about a month; I was transferred to Leto Beach, Long Island where I was discharged. I think it was July or August, 1946.

**WC:** Where about were you when they dropped the atomic bombs?

**JC:** I was in Okinawa, that would've been August of '45. They claim, you can probably verify this, they claim the japs surrendered the middle of August, I can distinctly remember the battleship Pennsylvania, that had to have been the middle of august, the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>. Took about three or four torpedoes one night, 'cause I used to listen to the radio traffic. Neither the following night or the next night a transporter was hit, I forget if that was with a bomb or with torpedoes. You'd be aboard ship and listen to the radio and go ashore and the guys say, "Gee, the wars over," you wonder what the heck was going on. I guess September it was official, early September. Even in the water I never saw that much shooting going on. Everybody was firing everything they had. It was quite a day.

**MR:** After you were discharged did you make use of the GI bill at all?

**JC:** Yes sir, I went to the University of Rochester.

**MR:** The 52 20 Club?

**JC:** No, you know funny thing about that. I was single at the time living at home; I just got out of the navy. I was getting ready to go to school, I was going to go to Bowling Green out in Ohio, because my brothers out there, and I wanted to sign for the 52 50. I left the paperwork on the counter where ever I signed up for it. They had a police officer deliver it and my mother was home at the time. She found out and when I got home she said don't you ever take any money from the government. That was it, she said you don't take any money, she said you go out and get it. I said I'm waiting to go to school. She said then you get some money that you saved while you were in the service.

**MR:** Did you join any veterans' organizations?

**JC:** Yeah I was in the American Legion for a while, and then I dropped out of there and joined the VFW. I became a life member of the VFW. I still belonged to the legion but I renew it every year, most years not every year.

**MR:** Did you ever stay in contact with anyone who was in the service with you.

**JC:** Oh yeah, we had reunions, Battalion reunions from 1948, I went to probably about five or six of them. In the years when you get married and have kids, I missed quite a few of them, but I did manage to make about five or six of them. The last one we had in '02 I think it was, in Colorado springs, we had 27 men show up, and there were two on oxygen and two in wheelchairs, and we figured that that would be the last, we haven't had reunions since, but I still talk to probably about five or six, including Jean Ross I was talking about, and Dick, and there's a fellow in Connecticut, and there's a man in Maine, Frances Carter, I still talk to him, and that's about all that's left, there aren't many of us left.

**MR:** How do you think your time in the service had effected or changed your life?

**JC:** Well I don't think there's a day that goes by that I don't think about it. You might see something or hear something, a sound, a smell, and I guess you could call it a flashback. I think anybody that was there had that experience wouldn't be the same. More so some days than others.

**MR:** If you could hold this so Wayne can focus on it, if you could tell us when and where that was taken.

**JC:** Well that had to have been taken right after we got out of boot camp, probably October of 1944 in Rochester. If it wasn't for my mother I don't think I'd ever have one taken because I really didn't want to take it but she insisted that I had to take it.

**MR:** Okay, thank you very much.